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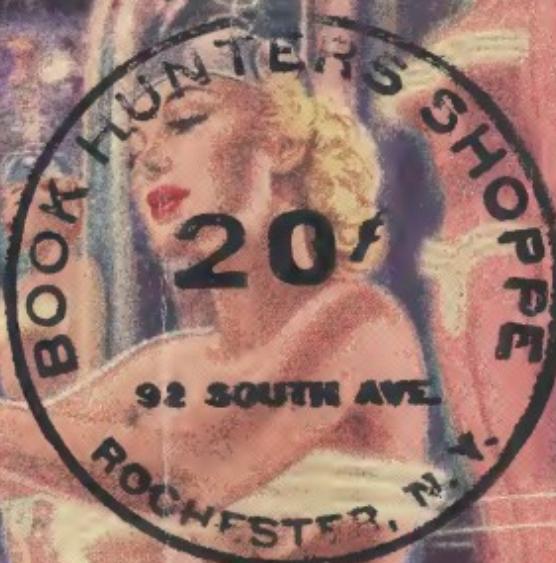
# Fantasy

READER No. 13

THE LOVE SLAVE AND THE  
SCIENTISTS — Frank Belknap Long



also stories by  
**Ray Cummings**  
**Albert R. Wetjen**  
**August Derleth**  
AND OTHERS



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No. 13

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# *Contents and Acknowledgments*

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THE LOVE-SLAVE AND THE SCIENTISTS <i>by Frank Belknap Long</i> .....	3
Copyright, 1935, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, for Weird Tales magazine, by permission of the author.	
THE CAVE <i>by Beatrice Grimshaw</i> .....	13
Copyright, 1932, by McCall Corporation.	
THE FORGOTTEN PLANET <i>by Sewell Peaslee Wright</i> .....	25
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THE CURIOUS CASE OF NORTON HOORNE <i>by Ray Cummings</i> ..	43
Copyright, 1920, by the Frank A. Munsey Co., by permission of the author.	
THE POWER AND THE GLORY <i>by Charles W. Diffin</i> .....	57
Reprinted by permission of the author with arrangement through Ackerman Fantasy Agency.	
HE WALKED BY DAY <i>by Julius Long</i> .....	63
Copyright, 1934, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, for Weird Tales magazine.	
ORIGINAL SIN <i>by S. Fowler Wright</i> .....	68
Copyright, 1950, by Arkham House for "Throne of Saturn." By permission of the author.	
THE THING THAT WALKED ON THE WIND <i>by August Derleth</i> ..	74
Copyright, 1932, by The Clayton Magazines, Inc.; copyright, 1945, by August Derleth for "Something Near." By permission of Arkham House.	
RAIDERS OF THE UNIVERSES <i>by Donald Wandrei</i> .....	83
Copyright, 1932, by The Clayton Magazines, Inc., for Astounding Stories Sept. 1932. By permission of the author.	
THE HOUSE OF SHADOWS <i>by Mary Elizabeth Counselman</i> .....	98
Copyright, 1933, by the Popular Fiction Publishing Company, for Weird Tales magazine.	
THE SHIP OF SILENCE <i>by Albert Richard Wetjen</i> .....	104
Copyright, 1932, by McCall Corporation.	
THE STREET THAT WASN'T THERE <i>by Clifford Simak and Carl Jacobi</i> .....	116
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# *The Love-Slave and the Scientists*

*by Frank Belknap Long*

Science has solved most of the problems of daily living; housing, food, health. But what has been done to solve the problems of the lonely, of the unloved? That seems to be a subject men of the laboratories shy away from—it is surrounded by too many taboos. Yet surely they could find an answer? Frank Belknap Long thinks there is an answer and in this rather piquant story, he presents it. But he also sees another side—science may have an answer, but will people stand for it? What if a misunderstood husband finds a scientific solution to his problem, will the wife tolerate the solution? Will a husband perceive the excellence of science's answer to the lonely housewife's problem?

R

AY-BRONZED and dripping, Gland Surgeon V67 emerged from the sun pool, and flicked the water from his hair and eyebrows. Then he stooped, and thrust a sturdy, muscular arm into the pale green water. The arm was seized by slim hands, and a voice said: "Help me out, darling."

V67 raised from the water an adorable form. His face was aglow with boyish rapture as he set it down beside him on the edge of the pool.

Mechanical Companion GH8 looked up at him. Her lips were parted in a smile, and the disk in her bosom said: "It is lovely up here in the sun. Kiss me, darling."

V67 bent, and implanted a fervent, lingering kiss on the soft, pneumatic lips of Mechanical Companion GH8. GH8 sighed, and her arms crept about the dripping shoulders of her very human and warm-blooded escort.

For a moment they embraced in silence. Then V67 gently untangled her arms, and asked: "Cold, my sweet?"

Mechanical Companion GH8 said nothing. The disk was exhausted. V67 debated for a moment with himself. Supervisor of Emotion T74 had supplied Companion GH8 with only one reply disk. He knew that if he rewound the record mechanism and set GH8 back in the pool she would swim and splash about and begin to talk to him again. But he was by no means certain that the glamor and enchantment would survive a second trial. Besides, there was a chill wind blowing, and his flesh was breaking out in goose-pimples.

With infinite tenderness he bent and lifted the fragile rubber form of Mechanical Companion GH8 from the gleaming, metallic margin of the pool. He had been compelled to time his questions so that they would accord with the answer intervals on the disk, but now he could talk to her more freely, and still preserve an illusion of reality.

Murmuring endearments he carried her across the sky garden and set her gently down in one of the racks which the Supervisor of Emotion had provided for exhausted companions. For a moment he stood gazing down at her with glowing eyes. Then, abruptly, he turned, and strode to the vacuum chute.

Three other men were waiting to enter the chute. One of them, a thin, ascetic-looking individual in striped swimming-shorts, was an associate of V67's at the Gland Surgery. V67 greeted him with upraised palm.

"Mechanical Companion GH8 was glorious," he said. "No man would *want* to divorce his wife these days. I was getting frightfully bored and despondent, but GH8 has corrected all that. Don't you like the Companions, J78?"

The man in shorts shook his head. "If I had my way these recreational gardens would be abolished," he said. "We are becoming a race of self-indulgent flat-fish. I like the pools here, and the squash-ball courts, but the Companions are utterly pernicious."

V67 frowned. "You need a gland injection, J78," he said. "A shot of adrenalin and perhaps a little thyroid. You talk like a Twentieth Century puritan."

J78 grunted. "And you behave like a perfect sybarite," he said. "It is a good thing we are not living in the Twentieth Century. Or even in the Twenty-first. The ancient moralists would have put you in a lethal chamber."

V67 laughed. "I'm not as bad as you think, J78," he said.

J78 grunted again.

One of the waiting men heaved himself up to the aluminum slide at the pinnacle of the vacuum chute and relaxed with a contented sigh. His weight caused the slide to tilt slightly. As he vanished from sight V67 said: "Do you mind if I go next? I'm ten minutes overdue at the surgery."

J78 and the other man nodded.

With a brisk, athletic leap V67 surmounted the slide and settled his long limbs in a reposeful attitude. Immediately the slide tilted, and released him. For an instant the soft blue sky above the sky garden was visible to his upturned gaze. Then it dimmed and vanished. A faint droning arose from the depths beneath, and a thick blanket of darkness settled about him.

He was soon speeding with a terrific velocity in a vertical direction. The chute was an almost perfect vacuum and he was compelled to hold his breath as the miles beneath him telescoped into a thrumming spatial porridge. The thrumming came from the pounding blood in his ears.

As he fell, his mind became a kaleidoscopic canvas. Something in the swift rhythms of the descent generated a mental attitude akin to slumber. As in a dream of infinite magnitude and brief duration his mind surged in the blackness.

In visual splendor he beheld a vivid panorama of Mechanical Companions dancing, racing and swimming for the edification of tired and despondent husbands. Their lithe, graceful bodies glistened in the screen-filtered sunlight on the flower-garlanded roof-tops of Cosmopolis.

Another vision flashed across his mind. He saw the Divorce Bureaus in the Fifth Level kiosks, saw the crowded booths and the rapidly growing mountains of writs and petitions. He saw the long, long files of hopeless women, the wan clerks, and—chief objects of pity—the bored and dispirited husbands.

It was a vision of the past. As V67 sped downward in the darkness the gloomy and depressing picture was replaced by a verbal hallucination. V67 distinctly heard the Dictator of Emotional Arts affirm: "The normal male will at times fervently crave the solace of a new face, and mysterious, unknown hands upon his brow. 'The wonder and enticement of a strange woman.' You are all familiar with the phrase. But if this antisocial urge could be surmounted as soon as it arises, in a way that would not provoke jealousy, and that would—" The voice droned on, became confused and indistinct.

V67 had another blinding vision of the sky gardens and their litho-limbed and rhythmically moving dispensers of solace. It was a joy to reflect that Mechanical Companions were already in attendance in thirty-three of Cosmopolis' sky gardens. The vogue, introduced at the beginning of the year 5678, was spreading like wildfire, and would undoubtedly tend to preserve and glorify the time-honored institution of monogamous marriage. No sensible wife could be jealous of a mechanical, pneumatic leisure-hour companion. It was the beginning of a new dawn in the emotional lives of thousands of husbands, and V67 had no misgivings as slowly from amidst the congeries of racing, dancing forms a lovely face wreathed in silver talc emerged, and usurped his vision. He saw again the enticing pneumatic lips of his own dear Mechanical Companion GH8, and heard her whisper: "It is glorious here in the sun. Are you happy, my darling?"

Metallic arms crept about him in the darkness, and the droning became a roar as of cyclopean dynamos.

The white-aproned street sanitationists of Level TG assisted him from the basal slide at the circular lower exit to Vacuum Chute H65. As he arose in the incandescent light the jointed basal slide shot upward. It would contact his associate J78 a thousand feet above the exit, and carry him downward in its mechanical arms.

V67 did not wait for his associate to arrive. He did not like J78. The man was a prig and a hypocrite. Striding rapidly along the pressed resovin pavement of Level TG he drew the spice-scented air deep into his lungs and exhaled with zest.

Ordinarily he shunned drugs. The mild intoxication produced by the health-air which circulated freely on Level TG, and the other non-recreational levels, was all the stimulation he needed. On this occasion, however, he extracted a small bluish vial from his upper tunic pocket, and poured upon his palm six grains of astravasin.

Astravasin deadened and dissipated the softer emotions, and stimulated

cold, scientific zeal. It was more favored by women than men, but V67 found it occasionally beneficial. He had sufficient virility to dismiss as irrelevant the conventional sneers which were directed against the male astravasin users.

He snuffed the drug into his nostrils and accelerated his pace. He was facing a trying ordeal. The patient awaiting him in the Gland Surgery was a victim of a hideous maladjustment of secretions. The wretch had actually reverted to the mores of the jungle, and killed his wife in a fit of jealous rage.

To steady his perspective, V67 walked to the edge of the pavement and looked down into the abyss beneath him. Far below, the outer extremities of the lower level platforms abutted above the great central artery of Cosmopolis. Down, down he stared, past the projecting tiers and platforms, past the laboratory levels and the industrial levels and the agrarian levels till his gaze rested on the cyclopean turbines five miles below.

A vertigo swept over him. He withdrew his gaze and walked on. Level TG was a running tier of laboratories. At intervals of fifty feet, circular doors opened in the resovin façade that ran the length of the entire cityward wall of the level. They were surmounted by blue-litten classification plates bearing labels in radiumite script. He passed the Skin and Exoskeleton Correctional Laboratory, the Sympathetic System Clinic, the Muscle and Nerve Surgery, the Epithelial and Glandular Tissue Laboratory, and the Tumor Removal Center. There was a long line of patients waiting to enter the Removal Center.

V67 shivered inwardly. He did not like to think about cancer. It was a major blight—the one appalling malady that had successfully defied the medical innovations of fifty centuries. A quarter of the population was afflicted with malignant tumors of one sort or another. The Health Supervisors affirmed that the malady was directly traceable to over-indulgence in electric baths and cosmic-ray rejuvenators, but V67 was skeptical of their glib and facile explanations.

He met several co-workers as he progressed toward the surgery. Bio-chemist H43, grave and severe in his india-rubber frock, greeted him with upraised palm as he emerged from Bio-chemical Clinic R66, and T52 saluted him from the edge of the pavement. He passed quickly by K99, L90 and W43.

"How is your wife?" asked W43.

V67 said: "Very well, thanks," and experienced a momentary qualm. It was absurd, of course. In adoring Mechanical Companion GH8 he had adhered to a highly moral conduct pattern. His wife could not possibly resent his attentions to an artificial woman. The Dictator of Emotional Arts had proclaimed after extensive research and experimentation that no normal wife could be jealous of a Mechanical Companion. Jealousy was a disease anyway—a pathological reversion to a primitive level of thought and feeling—but even when it did arise, its malignant shafts were directed against flesh-and-blood realities. The Dictator of Emotional Arts was a man of vast erudition, and V67 was content to abide by his decision.

V67 was now abreast of the Gland Surgery. Turning in at the bulb-mounted entrance he passed quickly down a long, blue-lit corridor, and nodded to the attendant at the door of the operating-room.

"F56 has just been asking for you," said the attendant. "Your patient isn't standing it very well."

V67 nodded gravely. He was conscious of an intense cerebral curiosity, but sympathy and compassion were alien to his mood. The astravasin was circulating freely in his blood-stream. With ceremonious precision he removed his tunic and asked the attendant for his antiseptic suit and mask.

The attendant opened a numbered drawer in a metal cabinet at his elbow, and handed V67 a folded rubber garment and a black surgical mask.

The mask was a cumbersome contrivance that went completely over his head. It had eyeholes of violet glass, and a long, twisted breathing-tube that terminated in a square metallic box in the region of the wearer's navel. In appearance it was strikingly like the Western European gas masks of the World Wars of 1914, 1936, 1967 and 1987 in the primitive artifacts wing of the Museum of Historical Antiquities on Level K97.

Having adjusted the mask and pulled the thin rubber antiseptic garment up over his shoulders, V67 nodded to the attendant and passed into the operating-room.

The operating-room was bathed in a diffused purple light. It was heavily impregnated with hylfoam, that powerful and dangerous anesthetic which exerted a numbing influence on the lower nerve centers, leaving them almost insensible to pain and yet with sufficient vitality to relay messages to the brain and spinal cord. Its action was insidious and curious. It entered the blood-stream by absorption through lungs and skin, and altered the vitalistic content of individual cells in every organ and tissue of the human body. Invented in the Twenty-third Century, it had displaced all the cruder anesthetics of an earlier age.

It had one disadvantage: it did not completely do away with pain. But as the victim of its fumes remained in full possession of his faculties and could even discourse rationally with his dissectors, the surgical workers who refused to countenance its use were branded as Twentieth Century sentimentalists, or worse.

V67 walked slowly across the vast, dome-ceilinged operating-room in the direction of Table 4R6. He breathed deeply of the pure oxygen which circulated beneath his antiseptic mask, and stopped occasionally to greet associates as he passed between the long tiers of tables. Three hundred and twenty-four operations were in progress.

Some of his associates were selecting and arranging their instruments, others were actually at work on the glands of their human subjects, and a few were busy rectifying blunders, or guarding against future mistakes by dissecting the dead.

When he arrived at Table 4R6 the tall form of Gland Surgeon F56 arose from a stooping posture, laid down a gleaming metallic instrument, and advanced to greet him: "You're ten minutes late," he said reproachfully, through the audition tube in the lower left-hand corner of his mask. "You know I'm too nervous to work past my schedule. My nerves are all shot. Why didn't you relieve me?"

"I'm sorry, F56," said V67. "I was sun-bathing in a sky garden, and you

know how exacting the new Companions are. You'd better take a shot of adrenalin before you leave."

He paused an instant, then asked: "How's the patient?"

F56 lowered his head. "He's lost consciousness," he said. "He's horribly over-emotional, I'm afraid."

"I should think he would be!" exclaimed V67. "A man jealous enough to subject his wife to an atomic bombardment just because she exchanged five-minute kisses with a turbine mechanic is mighty shabby human material."

"Jealousy is a revolting disease," affirmed F56. "A superstitious, utterly illogical hang-over from the ages of savagery. That man is actually living in the Twentieth Century."

"All strong emotion is pathological," assented V67 gravely. He was conscious that he was reaffirming a truism, but he had to say something to ease the tension. F56 was obviously worried about the man on the table. He had lost four cases in as many weeks, and the Chief of Staff was beginning to regard him with suspicion. If the suspicion became a certainty the Chief of Staff might conceivably decide that F56's place was where his patient was now lying. It was a contingency which F56 didn't like to think about. He loved the full, abundant life which his slightly unstable glands afforded him.

V67, despite the astravasin in his blood-stream, could sympathize with this very human weakness of his associate. He was himself slightly unstable. Mechanical Companion GH8 could bear witness to that.

Gripping his associate by the shoulder, he murmured reassuringly: "Don't worry, F56. I'll bring him out of it."

"Thanks, old man," said F56.

His gait was slightly unsteady as he turned from the table and made his way slowly across the vast domed room.

With a sigh V67 moved forward, and stood for a moment staring intently down at the white, haggard face of the man on the table. The subject was young, and physically robust. The surgeons of an earlier and less remorseless age would have shuddered at the way V67's associate had taken advantage of that robustness. There was only a small area of firm flesh remaining.

V67 did not shudder. The man on the table had been guilty of an anti-social act, and society insisted, as it had every right to do, upon a surgical corrective. The man had deliberately reduced his wife to an inert mass of gray ash by bombarding her with an atomic disintegrator. Men who succumbed to violent emotions were a menace to the peace and well-being of the Corporate Commonwealth. The surgeons of Cosmopolis were the benevolent masters, the therapeutic overlords of anti-social bodies. V67 dipped his fingers into a bowl of ammonium vapor, and rubbed them across the young man's brow.

Slowly, unsteadily, the patient's eyelids flicked open. For a moment he stared up in dazed bewilderment at his new benefactor.

Conquering his disgust and enmity, V67 said: "How do you feel now, boy?"

The young man's eyes showed an awareness of pain. He essayed a twisted smile. "I feel pretty rotten," he said. "How long is it going to take, Surgeon?"

"Not long," said V67. "Not long, boy. We've removed a portion of your thyroid and right lobe pituitary, and cut away practically all of your adrenal

cortex. A few stitches, and we'll be finished. I rather suspect that psychopaths will find that you will not require any mental reconditioning. The jealousy spasm was purely glandular."

"You mean, I wouldn't have—have disintegrated her if my glands had been normal?" asked the youth. His facial muscles contracted pitifully as he spoke.

V67 was busy with his surgical dressing. He nodded sadly as he sewed and kneaded the lacerated tissues into a semblance of normality. "I'm afraid the glands were at the root of all your troubles, boy," he said. "Your parental supervisors should have corrected the maladjustment in childhood."

"But several thousand years ago men often killed their wives," said the youth.

"Several thousand years ago men murdered one another on a wholesale scale in hideous blood-letting contests," said V67. "They had no control whatever. You can not justify your conduct by exalting the primitive, my lad. If our race has raised itself above the level of the jungle it has done so only by a long process of selective mating. When the eugenists of the Twenty-second Century started selecting stocks on a glandular basis they—"

"Were blind!" interrupted the youth, in desperation. "Blind, I tell you. War *was* awful, but love—"

V67 shrugged. "We still love," he said.

The youth's face twisted in a grimace. "You think you do," he said.

"We have overcome certain crude and violent prejudices, that is all," said V67 calmly. He wished the young man would not talk so much. His ceaseless, primitive chatter unnerved him, despite the astravasin in his blood-stream.

He did not realize that the young man was talking to keep up his courage. It was not so much the pain that the young man dreaded. He dreaded the thought that he would become like his benefactor—high-minded, impartial and serene.

But there was nothing the young man could do. He was bound and helpless. He would be turned into a cool, impersonal cog in the vast mechanism of the Corporate State. "Curse them!" he muttered, in jungle fury. "Curse them all!"

His resentment was short-lived. The excess glandular secretions were ceasing to stimulate his brain even as he spoke. With the glands removed, the remaining hormones became mild aids to normality instead of goads to anti-social action.

For exactly forty-five minutes V67 labored with painstaking care. Then he straightened, dipped his instruments in a basin of pale blue antiseptic, and drew a thin sheet of transparent rubber over the breast and limbs of his patient.

"You'll be all right now," he said. "I'll prescribe a cathartic, and your digestion will be checked by the dietician."

The youth's eyes were melancholy, and resigned. "Thank you, Surgeon," he said.

Ten minutes later V67 was standing before a vacuum chute in the Release Corridor of Level TG. He was very tired. His work was exacting and arduous, and the unstable portions of his personality were in mild revolt. It was

really unjust that he should be compelled to devote five hours a week to social labor, he told himself. It was his conviction that with a more equitable distribution of leisure and a more rigidly planned economy the work quotas could be substantially reduced.

"Your turn, V67," said an impatient, red-haired bio-chemist on the opposite side of the chute.

V67 nodded, climbed up and relaxed on the broad, unstable slide. The slide tilted and released him. He thought of many things as he shot downward in the darkness. The faces of Mechanical Companion GH8 and his wife vied for supremacy in his mind. Eventually they merged into a single image, and he sighed in rapture.

It was a mystical ideal he beheld now—the composite of all feminine loveliness. Mechanical Companion GH8 was simply another aspect of his wife's personality. It was absurd to imagine that the concept *woman* did not embrace a variety of lovely forms. Individual women were merely facets, isolated aspects of one eternal and glorious reality—the feminine principle, imperishable, mysterious and sublime.

"My own sweet wife and dear companion," he murmured, in mystical adoration.

Down, down he swept. The blood throbbed in his temples, his pulses ached. Finally a droning began and he felt something collide with his nether extremities. Then the steel-cold arms of the jointed basal slide crept about him, and his consciousness reverted to a more practical level.

He emerged in a glare of incandescence. The sun-simulating arc lamps which lined the cityward wall of Suburban Home Level RH shone down upon him in radiant splendor, and a tempered buoyancy came upon him as he climbed from the slide and turned his steps in the direction of his suburban home.

He hoped that his wife had heard no disquieting rumors. The sky gardens were far removed, both spatially and spiritually, from the quiet haven of his home. As he walked between the cyclopean tiers of potted shrubs, the great domed aquariums with their myriads of brilliant-hued and exotic fishes and crustaceans, and felt upon his brow the warm sea breezes still redolent with the spices of far islands and archipelagoes as they emerged from hundreds of swinging odophones, a look of supreme contentment came into his face.

So rapidly did he walk that he traversed the distance between the chute exit and the portals of his suburban home without meeting anyone. Stepping into the vacuum lift he was whirled up fifty-five stories, and emerged in the community corridor adjoining his wife's quarters.

The corridor was deserted. He was glad of this, for he did not wish to talk to dull and gossipy B54, or exuberant and boisterous C88, or any of the other tenants of Story 55.

As he tiptoed across the floor to the door of his wife's television room a great joy came upon him. He felt confident that she would be sitting relaxed in the darkness, enjoying an African or Asian telolog. He would steal up behind her and implant a fifteen-second kiss on the nape of her neck, immediately beneath the two blond curls which intertwined so adorably below her coiffure.

He laid his hand on the door and drew it outward. The television room was in darkness as he had anticipated, and his wife was clearly visible from the doorway. Clearly visible, and leaning on the shoulder of another man!

As his gaze swept the room he felt his flesh go suddenly cold. It was an optical illusion, of course—a mad, cruel hallucination caused by the astravasin in his blood-stream.

Yet his wife was actually *whispering* in the darkness as she stroked the dark, curly hair of the other man. Her head rested on his right shoulder, and he was crushing her hand in his long, virile fingers.

"My dear, my darling," she whispered. "You understand me."

"It is glorious here in the darkness," said her companion.

Somehow the grave, mechanical tones of the speaker's voice seemed vaguely unnatural. V67 had no clear notion at first as to the cause of this. He simply stood trembling in the doorway, resisting the evidence of his senses, and telling himself over and over that it was the astravasin, the astravasin. The drug soothed at first, but later it heightened and distorted the perceptions of sense. What he saw was surely nothing more than a visual illusion, the figments of a drug-fevered brain.

The attempt at evasion was tragically short-lived. Slowly, insidiously, the truth crept upon him, and he was shaken to the core of his being by the sickening realization that his wife had succumbed to the flatteries of that newest of fads and abominations—the sirupy-voiced male Mechanical Companion!

The horror of it was more than he could sanely endure. With an oath he slammed the door shut, and strode fiercely into the room.

His wife turned about, and screamed. Without uttering a word V67 lifted the Companion into the air and brought him down with violence on the tempered steel floor of the television room.

There ensued a crash. Something tinkled in the mannikin's chest, and a small revolving wheel emerged from a twisted sleeve, and rolled diagonally across the floor. With a curse V67 picked the detestable creature up, and hurled him across the room. Never in his life had he experienced such primitive, unregenerate wrath.

The Companion collided with the opposite wall and sank limply to the floor. As his head contacted the hard steel the record in his breast said: "Your husband does not esteem you as I do. I see you enwreathed in roses, bedewed in mists of glory. Your lips are like a lotus-flower, and the touch of your hand is a healing benison. When you are beside me the moon's splendor is enhanced tenfold, and all the stars of heaven sing for me."

V67 turned slowly about. His wife was shrinking white-faced against the base of the television screen.

"So you console yourself with a gigolo in my absence!" he cried, his lips livid with wrath.

"A gig—gig—" stammered his wife, in a frightened whisper.

V67 cursed his wife's lack of erudition. "The new male Companions are exactly like the abominable gigolos of the ancient world," he muttered fiercely. "A more despicable type of parasite never existed."

"But the Dictator of Emotion has announced that Mechanical Companions are perfectly respectable," pleaded his wife, in desperation.

V67 looked at her. His eyes were destitute of compassion. "He was speaking of the female Companions," he said. "That sort of thing is all right for a man."

"It's a strange rule that doesn't work both ways," said the wife, in a despairing tone.

Brutal and primitive passions were flooding V67 in waves. Something loathsome and aberrant in his nature surged to the surface, and for a moment he felt an impulse to strike his wife—actually to strike her—with the flat of his hand.

The impulse generated its own negation. Man is not built to cross the humanizing gulf of forty centuries and revert to the savagery of a dead world without experiencing an overwhelming reaction. No sooner had V67 experienced the detestable emotion than a great shame and horror came upon him. He sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hand.

Compassionately his wife rose and crossed to where he was sitting. Slipping to the floor beside him, she rested her blond, talc-wreathed head against his right knee.

"My poor darling," she whispered. "Do you imagine for a moment that he has taken your place in my affections? Why, he is a mere mechanical toy, an amusing diversion. Even if he does talk divinely of moonlight and roses he is, in essence, nothing but a gadget. I was lonely, and horribly unhappy, and I wanted to make you jealous. But if you will give up that *creature*—"

V67 was silent for a moment. Then his hand descended, and caressed his wife's coiffure. As the flimsy adornment slipped between his fingers he said: "You are right, my sweet. Tomorrow I shall ask Supervisor of Emotion T74 to give me permission to dismantle Mechanical Companion GH8. You will doubtless be relieved when the bosom records are destroyed, and the tender, individual nuances of her face, throat and limbs cease to exist as parts of an illusionary whole."

His wife looked up at him. She thought: "He will give up Mechanical Companion GH8 for my sake, but he still loves her. He is going to dismantle her because he can not bear the thought of surrendering her to another. In his sight she will always remain as young and lovely and inaccessible as the figures on a Grecian urn. How did the ancient poet phrase it?

"She can not fade, though thou hast not thy bliss.  
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair.

"I shall have a *real* rival now."

There was a far-away look in V67's eyes as he continued, tenderly, to caress his wife's silver coiffure.

## *The Cave*

by Beatrice Grimshaw

Beatrice Grimshaw is one of those gifted writers who can bring the glamour, beauty, and mystery of the South Seas into the hearts of every reader. In these days when so many Americans remember the South Seas only as a scene of battle, as an uncomfortable place for a homesick C.I. to be, it is good to hark back to those more pacific days when the true color of the Islands could be appreciated at leisure. Among Miss Grimshaw's many colorful tales, there are some which reflect the haunting mystery of those lonely places. In "The Cave" we venture to say there has been introduced what may be the largest spectre ever described. And a very small island is certainly no place to share with a very large ghost!

O

VER Rafferty's Luck—misnamed—the wind seemed always blowing. Perhaps it did not really blow as much as I imagined. Perhaps, for the first time in my life, I merely had leisure to observe such things, and to be impressed by them.

To see how the long grasses shivered, showing the footmarks of the wind, as it strode over them like Peter striding on the sea; as it suddenly failed and sank—like Peter—leaving behind it a flurry of stirred leaflets that made you think of flaws on water. . . . How, in the tide of the grass, always rising higher against the few doomed buildings, there streamed and wavered, like wonderful seaweeds, long strands of bishop-purple bougainvillea, and *allamanda*, all gold—wreckage of the creepers that used to climb over the roof and wall. How a loose door, in office, or bungalow, would suddenly give itself to the wind, and shut with a thunderous noise, making one think, for a distracted moment, that somebody had returned. . . .

Nobody did. It had not been anticipated that anyone would, when the owners of the bankrupt mine had hired me to stay there. I was to hold the place by doing a little work, while they went afield looking for capital—which they hardly expected to get. There was just enough chance of it, however, to make it worth their while to send me to the island, and leave me there at a negligible salary, with six-months' stores, and the freedom of the whole place, on which there was not so much as a native or a dog. Only myself and the deserted shaft and the rotting bungalow, and the wind that blew continually, com-

plainly, through the grasses, and through the fallen creepers, wine-colored and gold.

There were these, and something else. There was a shadow on the island: the loom of a strange and eerie story but half-told.

Rafferty's Luck had not failed from the usual causes—not altogether, that is. It had gone through the common history of little, remote mines; supposed at first to be very rich in copper, it had turned out to be a mere pocket, with a problematical vein behind it, that might or might not be worth developing when found.

It had been worked by the partners—there were three—in turns. The island was far out of the track of ships; it had been visited accidentally, by a shipwrecked crew. Three of these had found the copper, and kept silence; and later on, two had gone up to work it.

They had worked it, won enough ore for a good show, and waited confidently for the returning boat. But—when it came, it found only one man. The other had killed himself. Without any reason, he had cut his throat.

The third man took his place, and arranged, as before, that a passing schooner should call. It called within a few days, and found one man. The other, without any reason, had leaped over a precipice, and died.

Upon this, the third went away, and stayed so long that the mine—which was on British territory, and under mining-laws—had nearly been forfeited. At the last moment the men now interested in it got me to go and hold the place, while the third partner went to London for capital.

They were candid enough—they told me that the island was under a shadow; and when I asked just what they meant, they said: "Exactly that. Rafferty and Wilder" (the two who had died) "both said something about shadows."

"What?" I asked.

"Nothing that anybody could understand. Rafferty had cut almost through his windpipe, and Wilder's face was smashed in by the fall. As like as not," went on the third partner,—France was his name,—"as like as not, drink had something to do with it; they were neither of them sober men."

"But you are—and you didn't come to any sort of grief?"

"I am—and I didn't."

"Yet you don't feel like staying. You only had a few days of it."

"Haven't I told you I must go and scare up some cash? Are you on, or not?"

"I am on," I said.

"Good. A man with an M.C. and a D.C.M. like you—"

"Hang the M.C. and the D.C.M. I'm going because I'm broke, and because I want to know what it's like to be really alone. As for your shadows, they won't make me jump over cliffs. I take one spot after sundown, never more."

"Good," said France again. He looked at me as if it was in his mind to say something more, but whatever the thing was, he kept it back. . . . "About the journey," he continued. . . .

Six weeks later I was left at Cave Island by a whaleboat—the last step in a decline that began with an ocean liner, continued through inter-island

schooners and trading ketches, and ended in the last ketch's boat, sent off to ferry me through a network of reefs too dangerous for any sizable ship.

"If there is payable ore here," I thought, "small wonder it's been overlooked; God-forsaken and Satan-protected the place is, and out of the way of the world!" And I began to wonder, as the whaleboat stemmed green shallows, making for the hummocky deserted bay that stretched beyond, whether I had done well. I am from Clare; I have seen the dread sea-walls of Moher, and felt, on their high crowns, the "send" of that unknown evil that men of Ireland, for the confounding of strangers, chose to personify as the frightful Phooka. "This too is an evil place," I thought, and on that account, I said a small prayer. Now mind you, it was well done, as you shall afterwards know.

Then we beached, and began unloading my gear; and I was too busy with that, and with carrying most of it up to the bungalow, before dark should fall, to think of anything else. By and by the boat was back at the ship's side, a long way out, and the ship had made sail, and when I looked at her, in the last of the light, and saw her fading away like a ghost that has given its message, and goes back to its tomb, I knew that I was indeed alone—pressed down and running over, I had my wish!

After a day or two, I began to wonder what all the trouble was about, if indeed there had ever been any trouble except drink and the consequences of it. Cave Island was a windy spot, as I have said; not very large or long, only a mile or two at biggest, it was swept by all the winds that blow across the immense, lonely spaces of the central Pacific world, where almost no land is. In the mornings and at nights it was cool; during the day nothing but the wind saved it from most torrid heat. It was a barren place, and full of stones, some of them black and spongy and as big as houses. There was coarse grass, that never seemed to be still, almost as if things unseen ran under it, and kept it moving even in a calm. There were a few flowers that Rafferty had planted in his time, and there was the iron bungalow, and a storing shed, and a shaft with bucket and windlass dangling over, and tools abandoned by the side. For the rest, there was the sun wheeling over the island, at night the myriad unpitying stars, and always sea and sea. So lonely it was, that you could hear yourself breathe; out of the wind, you could listen to your heart beating. When you got up in the morning you took the burden of yourself upon your shoulders, and carried it, growing heavier and heavier, all day; even at night, it was with you in your dreams. Yet I liked this, as one likes all strong, violent experience. Solitude is violent; it is delicious, it is hateful; and as surely as a snake unwatched can strike, so it can maim or kill. . . .

What do you know, you who think that solitude is a locked room in a city, or a garden with the neighbors shut away?

A week or so went past. Every day I went to the workings, did a job with pick and shovel; wrote in my diary what I had done, and for the rest, was free. I liked to be free. Not since the war—and certainly not in it—had I been my own man; if I was not filling one of the blind-alley jobs that

confront the untrained, hardly educated man of near forty, I was harder at work than ever, hunting another.

But if I was free, I was not at ease. I could see, after the first few days, that there was not much in the mine—worse, that there was never likely to be. I had worked copper before, and I judged that the worst of it was better than the best of this, once the surface show had been removed. In fact, it was nothing but a pocket. And how was a mere pocket going to give me a brick bungalow with an arched veranda, in Bondi or Coogee, and a garden behind it and a little touring-car, and a tobacconist's business somewhere near the surf beaches, to keep all going; and in the garden, behind the windowpanes of the bungalow, in a long chair on the veranda, at the wheel of the car, or swimming brown and bonny through the surf—always there, in my heart and in my life, the girl of my hopeless dreams.

No, I had not told France all the truth. He is a good fellow, but one does not give him confidences. Being broke was nothing new to me; being alone, the spice of it, the strangeness, I could have done without. But Rafferty's Luck offered the one and only chance I had of making my dream come true, and I would have taken it if it had led halfway to hell.

Instead, it seemed to lead to nothing.

I was so disappointed, so sore against France—whom I now perceived to be engaged in the familiar trick of unloading a hopeless venture upon a public too far away to understand—that I set my teeth, and resolved to hunt the island from coast to coast—to comb it through for a better show, and if found, to take that show myself. I don't know that this was moral; I only know I was prepared to do it.

By this time, I had forgotten all about the "shadow," and the suicides. Men who have roughed it, who own little, are not particularly shocked at suicide, or sudden death of any kind. You must have much to lose before you shudder at the passing breath of the storm that has swept another from his hold on life, and that will one day sweep you too.

So I did not think about Rafferty, or about Wilder—until the day when I found the cave; and after that it all began.

I had been prospecting over the summit of the island, without much success. On this day, I went down to the beach, and began patiently to circle the whole place, resolving, literally, to leave no stone unturned in the search for something better than Rafferty's Luck. It takes longer to walk all around an island than you'd think, even if the island is no more than a mile or two across. I spent all day upon the job, eating a biscuit for dinner, and drinking, once or twice, from the little streams that ran out of the crevices. If any of them had tasted ill I should have been glad; but they were all fresh as milk, no tinge of metal in them.

Toward sunset I came upon something that I hadn't noticed before—a cave. It was at the foot of an immense wall of rock; you could not have seen it from above, and the only way of reaching it was the way by which I had come, a painful climb along the narrow glacis of stones on the windward side. The beach and the anchorage were of course on the lee side.

Ships wouldn't, for their lives, come up to windward; I was therefore almost sure that nobody, save myself, had seen or visited the cave.

That pleased me—you know how it is. I was glad that I had brought my torch with me—a costly big five-cell, like a searchlight, that She had sent me when I sailed; she hadn't sixpence to rub against sixpence, but she would have given her head away—and so would I; that was why we both were poor, and likely to remain so. . . .

I had a good look at the cave. It was very high; seventy or eighty feet at least. It was not quite so wide, but it seemed to run a good way back. The cold stream of wind that came out of it had a curious smell; I could not describe it to myself, otherwise than by saying that the smell seemed very old. I stood in the archway, in that stream of slightly tainted wind, examining the rocks about the mouth of the cave. There was not much daylight left now, but I could see, plainly enough, that here was small hope of a better find. I kept the torch in my hand as I went on into the interior of the cave; time enough, I thought, to turn it on when I had to; there were no spare batteries on the island.

By and by I began to go backwards; that is, I went on a little way, and then turned to look at the ground I had passed, lit up by the stream of light from the entrance. Coral, old and crumbling underfoot; limestone; a vein of conglomerate. Nowhere any sign of what I sought. It was getting darker; the cave, arching high above me, seemed to veer a little to one side, and the long slip of blue daylight was almost gone. Now, with half-a-dozen steps, I lost it altogether; I stood in complete darkness, with the cool wind streaming about me, and that strange, aged smell, now decidedly stronger.

"Time for the light," I thought. Something made me swallow in my throat, made me press my foremost foot tight to the ground, because it seemed, oddly enough, to have developed a will of its own; it wanted to move back, and the backward foot wanted to swing on its toe and turn round. . . . I will swear I was not afraid—but somehow my feet were.

I snapped on the light, and swung it ahead. It showed a narrow range of rock wall on each side; a block of velvet darkness ahead, and in the midst of the darkness, low down, two circles of shining bluish green. Eyes—but what eyes! They were the size of dinner-plates! They did not move, they only looked; and I was entirely sure that they saw me. If they had been high up, I do not think I should have minded them—much. But they were, as I have said, low down, and that was somehow horrible. Lurking. Treacherous. . . .

I had shot crocodiles by night, discovering them exactly as I had discovered this unnamed monster, by the shine of their eyes in torchlight. But I had had a sporting-rifle to do it with, and knew what I was shooting at. Now I was totally unarmed; the futile shotgun I had brought with me for stray pot-hunting, was up at the bungalow. I had not the vaguest idea what this creature might be, but I knew what was the only thing to do under the circumstances, and I did it: I ran away.

Nothing stirred. Nothing followed me. When I reached the outer arch of the cave, all glorious with sea and sunset, there was not a sound anywhere but the lifting crash and send of the waves upon the broken beach,

I stood for a moment looking at the magnificent sky that paled and darkened while one could quickly have counted a hundred. "I shall have to come back," was my thought, "with a charge of dynamite, and a bit of fuse. Shotgun just as much use as a pea-shooter." I told myself these things, but now that I was out of the cave, I could not for the life of me believe in what I had seen. "It wasn't the sort of smell it ought to have been," I said aloud weakly, and kicked the stones about aimlessly with my foot. Something rolled. I looked at it, and it was a skull.

"Peter Riordan," I said, "this is not your lucky day." And I picked up the skull. There were bones with it, all loose and lying about. "I can make a guess what happened to Mr. Bones!" I said, peering through swiftly falling twilight at the skull. It was like a shock of cold water to see that it was old beyond computing—almost fossilized, dark and mossy with the passage of incalculable time. As for the bones, they crackled like pie-crust when I put my foot on them. I could see where they had fallen out of the rock; they must have lain there buried, for a long time.

"I don't understand," I thought. "Things don't fit together. This is a hell of an island." It seemed good to me to climb the cliff as fast as I could, making for the solid walls of the bungalow, and leaving behind me in the inhospitable twilight those queer bones now unburied, and the cave, and the immense green eyes that did not move.

The bungalow was a good way off; in order to reach it, I had to cross the empty rolling downs on the top of the island, with their long grass that never was still, and their heaps of hummocks of black stone. By this time it was so late that I could only see the stones as lumps of indefinite darkness. Some of them were big even by daylight; by night they looked immense. They were queerly shaped, too; once, when I paused to get breath (for I can assure you I was going hard) I noticed that the biggest one in sight looked exactly like the rounded hind-quarters of an elephant, only no elephant ever was so big.

I leaned against a boulder, and mopped my face. There was a rather warm wind blowing; it brought with it the sort of scents that one expects by night—the dark-green smell of grass wet with dew, the curious singeing odor of baked stones gradually giving out their heat, little sharp smells of rat and iguana, out hunting. And something else. . . .

"Peter Riordan," I said, "you quit imagining things that aren't there. Rafferty did, and Wilder did." And I propped myself against the stone, and took out a cigarette.

It was never lighted. Just as I was feeling in my matchbox, I looked at the giant boulder again, and as I hope for heaven, I saw it walk away. That is, it did not walk—it hobbled, lurching against the sky.

For obvious reasons I didn't light the cigarette, but I put it into my mouth, and chewed it; that was better than nothing. "We aren't going to be stampeded," I said (but noiselessly, you may believe). "We are going to see this through." And, being as wise as I was brave—perhaps a little wiser—I got inside a sort of pill-box of loose stones, and peered out through the openings. By this time it was as dark as the inside of a cow; you could only see stars

and stars, and the ink-black blots made against them by one thing and another. And the great black thing that wasn't a boulder, and wasn't an elephant, went lurching and lumbering, smashing through Orion, wiping Scorpio off the sky, putting out the Pointers where the Cross was waiting to come up; it seemed to swing all over the universe.

"It's chasing something," I thought.

It was. One could see it tack and turn with incredible swiftness, swinging behind it something that might have been legs and might have been a tail. Clearly, it was hunting, like the rats and the iguanas, and now I could see—or thought I could see—the thing it hunted: Something very small, compared with the enormous bulk of the beast; something that dodged in and out of the stones, running for its life. A little, upright thing with a round head, that scuttled madly, squeaked as it ran.

Or had I fancied the squeak? The whole amazing drama was so silent that I could not be sure. It seemed to me that if there had been a cry, a queer thin cry, I had heard it inside my head, not outside. I can't explain more clearly, but there are those who will understand. At any rate, I was sure the thing had cried, and that it had cause. The end was approaching.

There was another frantic doubling, another swing around of the immense hobbling beast, and then the little creature simply was not—and the enormous shadow had swept to the edge of the cliff and over, and was gone.

I felt my forehead wet. My breath was coming as quickly as if it had been I who had squeaked and doubled there, out among the night-black grasses and the stones. . . . The shadow! They who died had seen shadows.

"But," I found myself saying argumentatively, to the silent stars, "I am real, and that wasn't. It's like things in a dream, when you know the railway engine can't run over you, because it isn't really there."

Something obscurely answered: "Rafferty is dead, and Wilder is dead. Death is real."

I got out of the pill-box. "I shall say the multiplication table all the way home," I told myself. And I did. But when I had got home to the bungalow, I said something else—I said a prayer. "Perhaps they didn't," I thought. Then I went in, and cooked my supper. It was quite a good supper, and I slept very well.

Next morning nothing seemed more impossible than the things that, I was assured, had not happened last night. All the same, I decided to go and have another look at the cave, with plenty of dynamite, and the shotgun, for what that might be worth. I could not forget that Beth, who would give her head away—and who had given her heart—was waiting for that brick house, and that little car, and those Sunday mornings on the surf beaches. And I was resolved that she should not miss them.

It was now about ten days since I landed, and I began, for the first time, to count the days that remained. France would have to reach London, find a simpleton who would finance his venture (I knew he'd do it—he could have squeezed money out of a concrete pillar), return to Australia, and make his way to the island. Six weeks; three weeks; six weeks; three or four weeks. Nineteen in all. And I had put one week and a half behind me. There

remained seventeen and a half. Four months and a half. A hundred and twenty-two days, if I succeeded in keeping my senses. If I did not, it was a hundred and twenty-two minus *x*.

I could see the *x* in front of me; a black, threatening thing, big as a garage door. But I defied it. "You won't get *me*," I said. "I'm bound for Bondi and the brick bungalow." And, whistling "Barnacle Bill" to keep my spirits up, I began to cut lead piping into slugs. "Ought to have brought a rifle," I thought, "but never mind; I can do something with these, and a bit of dynamite and a fuse."

It took me about fifteen minutes to cut up the slugs. When I raised my eyes from the table on which I was working, I saw, through the window of the cottage, a steamer—a small trading-boat with a black and white funnel. She was out in the roadstead, and she was just preparing to let go anchor.

I let off a shout; you should hear a Clare man do it!

"X, I've got you," I cried. "Dead as a doornail—stabbed with your own beastly minus!" And I sent the lead pipe flying across the floor. I just had to make a noise.

In the roadstead, the little steamer was making a terrible row with her roaring anchor-chains, and a whaleboat was rapidly being lowered. Within ten minutes, France and I were shaking hands.

"Never went to London at all," he told me at the top of his voice. "Got the whole lump of expenses right in Sydney, from two or three splendid chaps who were staying at my hotel. Loads of money. Country fellows."

"They would be," I thought, remembering France's local reputation.

"Brought the machinery up with me. Brought a geologist. Get a start, get a nice report, go down again and float the company."

"Leaving me in charge?"

"That's right."

"It isn't—not by a mile! France," I said, looking him straight in the eyes,—he had candid, jolly blue eyes, the little beggar, and he had a smile under his toothbrush mustache that would have wiled cash out of a New York customs-officer,—"France, I don't like this affair of yours any too well, and I'd prefer to be out of it." For I knew, now, that the little car and the Sundays in the surf would have to come by some other road.

"Got the wind up?" he asked, cocking his hat on one side of his head, and looking at me impertinently.

"I don't know about that," I said,—and indeed I did not know; it was a puzzling matter,—"but I do know that there isn't enough payable copper here to sheet a yacht."

"Oh, you're no expert," he said easily. "Let me introduce Mr. Rattray Smith, our geologist. Mr. Peter Riordan."

"Why not a mining engineer?" I asked curtly, glancing with some distaste at the academic-looking youth who had followed France out of the boat.

"Came too high," explained France with a charming smile. "Smith knows copper when he sees it."

"I reckon he knows which side his bread is buttered on," I commented, without troubling to lower my voice over-much. I simply could not stand

that geologist; he was such a half-baked looking creature, fairly smelling of chalk and blackboards.

"Quite," was France's answer. "And he's got all sorts of degrees; look lovely on a prospectus."

"Maybe," was all I answered. I heard afterwards that Smith's degrees were more showy than practical, from our point of view—B.Sc., F.G.S., and something else that I forgot; palaeontology was his special game, and he knew next to nothing about metals. France had got him cheap because he had been ill, and needed a change. France, it appeared, meant to make full use of Mr. Rattray Smith's shining degrees in the forthcoming prospectus; meantime, as he somewhat coarsely put it to me, he intended to "stuff the blighter up for all he was worth."

"You go and take him for a walk," he said to me now. "Show him the workings, and help him with his notes. I've got to see the machinery ashore."

I didn't want to see that machinery land; I knew only too well what it would be—old, tired stuff that had been dumped on half-a-dozen wharves, for the deluding of share-holders, in many places; stuff never meant to be used, only to be charged at four times its value in expense accounts. . . . I took Smith to the workings; showed him the ore, lowered him down the shaft, displayed the various tunnels. I said not a word. He could delude himself if he liked; I meant to have no hand in it.

Perhaps he was not such a fool as he looked; perhaps, I cynically told myself, he was more knave than fool. At all events, he said very little, and took only a few notes. I began to like him better, in spite of his horn-rimmed glasses and his academic bleat.

"Look here," I said, as we were returning to the house. "I've been all over the damned island, and I'll eat any payable stuff you find."

"All over?" he said, cocking one currant-colored eye at me through his glasses.

I began to think he might not be such a fool as he looked. Clearly he had sensed a certain reserve that lay behind my speech.

"Well," I said, not caring enough about him to mince words, "there's a warren of caves down on the wind'ard side of the island and I tried to investigate the biggest one the other day."

"What did you find? Any indications?" he squeaked.

"Couldn't tell you. I was stopped by a beast. Nightmare beast, with eyes as big as plates. Hadn't a gun with me, but I meant to have a go at it later on."

"But that's—but that's most—" he began to stammer eagerly.

France, who had gone to the house for a drink, looked out of the window, and interrupted me.

"What's this about beasts, and why are you making slugs for your silly old shotgun?" he demanded.

I told him.

"You've got 'em too," was his only comment.

This, for some reason or other, made me desperate.

"That's not the whole of it," I said. "Last night I saw a thing as big as six elephants chasing a little thing in the dark."

"You would," he said. "Have a hair of the dog that bit you, and take some bromide when you're going to bed."

"Look here—will you come down to the cave yourself?" I pleaded.

"With all that machinery to land, and the ship bound to clear before sun-down? Not much."

"Very well. Will you come for a walk on the top of the island after dark?"

"Oh, yes," he said, casually. "Never saw anything when I was here for a fortnight, and don't expect to now. But I'll come."

"Was it moonlight when you were here?" I shouted after him as he started for the beach.

"What's that to—Yes, I reckon it was."

Rattray Smith began deliberately: "The influence of light on all these phenomena—"

"What d'ye mean?" I asked. "Are you a spiritualist? Surely you couldn't be."

"In the excellent company of Sir William Crookes and Sir Oliver Lodge, I certainly could," he answered. "I suppose you think that the modern man of science is necessarily skeptic, like his—his—"

"I think he believes either a darn' sight too little, or a devilish sight too much, if you ask me," I said. "But wait till tonight."

We waited. And after dark, we all went up to the top of the island and posted ourselves in the "pill-box." There was an enormous sky of stars above us; all round us the faintly smelling, feebly rustling grasses, and standing up among them, big as cottages and railway cars, were the silhouetted shapes of gigantic rocks.

I had thought we might have hours to wait, and after all might see nothing; but I was wrong. We had not been in the pill-box ten minutes, before a whole mass of stars before us went suddenly black. It was just over the biggest of the cottage-sized rocks, and I had a nasty idea that the rock itself—or what we had thought to be rock—was part of the rising mass.

Have you ever seen an innocent stick turn into a serpent, a log in a river show sudden crocodile-eyes and swim away?

If you have, then you will know how I felt.

Up went the monster, half across the sky; and now it began to lurch and hirple with that strange movement I had noted before, covering immense areas of ground with every lurch. I heard Rattray Smith draw in his breath with a sort of whistling noise.

"I don't think it'll touch us," I whispered, with my lips on his ear. "Keep quiet."

"Man," he said. "Oh, man!" and seemed to choke.

France kept quite still.

I smelled the queer smell of it, not the sort of smell it should have been; strangely old and non-pungent. I saw a small shadow, round-headed, come out of nowhere and scuttle away. I saw the great shadow hunting it. Smith saw too; for some extraordinary reason, he was crying, in broken, half-suppressed sobs.

"I don't reckon it can—" I began, in a cautious whisper. He interrupted.

"Man," he said, "you—you—don't know. I've seen discarnate spirits; I've seen—I—No matter. This is beyond everything one ever—*Woop!*"

They were out of the pill-box, like rats breaking cover, and I after them, going I didn't know where. I had seen what they had—and even though I didn't believe it, I ran. The big shadow had turned toward us, suddenly rearing itself up, up, until it stood a hundred feet high among the stars. It leaned a little forward, like something listening; it was semi-erect, and in its enormous forepaws it held a small dark thing that kicked and then was still.

"I—I—" stuttered Rattray Smith as we ran. "Discarnate dinosaur—spirits if they get angry—Where's the house?"

"Wrong way," I panted, seizing his elbow. I had caught a pale gray glimmer in front of us, and realized we were heading for the sea. We stopped and looked back. Something immense rocked heavily against the stars, coming up with appalling swiftness. I saw that it was between us and the bungalow. Not that that mattered; by its size, it could have cracked the bungalow like a nut—and that it meant, for sport or for spite, to drive us over the cliff. I knew—I don't know how—that it was powerless to treat us as it had treated the little black ghost of prehistoric man, in that strange reproduction of an age-old drama, but that it was an evil thing, and would harm us all it could. And I knew too, in the same swift enlightening moment, why one man of the two who died had fallen over the cliff, and why another had slain himself. The last had not been able to endure this terrible rending of the veil. . . .

"Smith," I panted, "stand your ground; you'll break your neck. It can't harm us. It's only the fear."

"Discarnate spirits—" he babbled. I did not heed him. I was busy doing what the soldier did for Joan of Arc, in her evil moment—making a Cross of two sticks, with a stem of grass twisted round them. I held it in my hand, and I said—no matter what. Those who know will know.

By ever so little, the giant shadow missed us, lurched forward and with one toppling leap, went down the cliff.

"Come on," I shouted to Smith and France, though I could not see the latter. "I've got my torch and a plug of dynamite; we'll see the whole thing through."

"What are you going to do?" squeaked Rattray Smith.

"Put out those eyes in the cave," I shouted. I was exhilarated, above myself—as one used to be in the war. I scrambled down the cliff in the transparent dark, feeling my way; slightly surprised, but not much, to hear Smith coming after, I found the cave.

We stood for a minute gaining breath, and looking about us. There was nothing to be seen anywhere; nothing to be heard but the steady slapping of waves on the beach.

"I'm with you," declared Smith squeakily. "As a palaeontologist—"

"A which?" I said. "Don't trip over those bones, and don't stop to pick them up now!"—for he was stooping down and fumbling. I added, without quite knowing what I meant, "The dinosaur's ghost didn't have eyes." But

he seemed to know; he said: "That makes it all the more—" I did not hear the rest; we were too busy picking our way.

Round the corner, we stopped. The eyes were there. Low down, unmoving, unwinking in the ray of the torch as I threw it on. Big as plates; blue-green, glittering—

"Hold the torch while I fix this," I whispered. Smith took it; his hand was unsteady, but I could not blame him for that. I bit off my fuse as short as I dared; lit it, and tossed the plug. . . .

There was a boom that almost cracked our ear-drums; immediately after, stones and dirt came smashing down in such quantity that we found ourselves staggering wildly, bruised and cut, beneath a hundred blows.

"Are you hurt?" I called to Smith.

"Bring your damned torch here," was his only reply.

I came forward, and found him on hands and knees in the midst of an amazing raffle of half-fossilized bones; some of them were as big as the masts of a ship, though partly smashed by the explosion. Almost falling loose from the cliff above our heads was the most astounding skull I had ever dreamed of, a thing far bigger than an elephant's, with huge eye-sockets set well forward, and the tusky jaws of a tiger. Behind the eye-sockets, as I waved the torch, shone a mass of something vivid, greenish blue.

"Oh, God," cried Smith—who didn't believe in God,—"you've broken up the finest dinosaur skeleton in the world!"

I was too busy to trouble about him. I had climbed a little way up, and was scraping at the mass of iridescent, green-blue crystals in which the skull was set; which, through uncounted ages, had sifted down through various openings, filling the huge orbits of the eyes, so that they gleamed in the light as if alive.

"I'd break up my grandmother's skeleton," I told him joyously, "if it was bedded in copper pyrites. We've found the paying stuff at last!" It was not the dark roof of the cave that I saw, as I said that, not the glittering pyrites, or the amazing great bones, or the scrambling, complaining figure of Smith on the floor of the cave. It was St. Mary's in Sydney, on a summer morning, with a white figure coming up the aisle "on her father's arm"—to me!

Rattray Smith, I understand, has written a great deal for different scientific magazines about the curious happenings on Cave Island. In one, he told the story of the great skeleton; how it was found, and where, and how put together again. He doesn't say what he got for it, but I believe that was something to write home about; good dinosaurs come high, with or without incredible ghost stories attached. The spiritualistic magazines simply ate up his account of the prehistoric ghost and its sinister activities. Especially did they seem to like his conclusions about the skeleton acting as a sort of medium, or jumping-off point, for the apparition. He may have been right or wrong there; at all events, it is certain that after the removal of the bones, no one engaged in working the mines ever saw or heard anything remarkable.

France? We found him in the bungalow, drunk, and under a bed. He says, and maintains, that we were all in the same condition. A man must save his face.

# *The Forgotten Planet*

*by Sewell Peaslee Wright*

*The name of Sewell Peaslee Wright is not seen today in the science-fiction pulps, but it was well known to the readers of the early thirties, for Wright was one of the men who put the infant science-fiction on its feet and headed it towards its present stature. Among his original successes were a series of stories taken from the "annals" of the "Interplanetary Patrol" as related by a retired old space captain, John Hanson. Told with the clear narration of a day when authors had to construct their own spaceships and do without formula stereotypes, we think the modern reader will get a kick out of the story of a world that had to be expunged from the records of the civilized stars.*



HAVE been asked to record, plainly and without prejudice, a brief history of the Forgotten Planet.

That this record, when completed, will be sealed in the archives of the Interplanetary Alliance and remain there, a secret and rather dreadful bit of history, is no concern of mine. I am an old man, well past the century mark, and what disposal is made of my work is of little importance to me. I grow weary of life and living, which is good. The fear of death was lost when our scientists showed us how to live until we grew weary of life. But I am digressing—an old man's failing.

The Forgotten Planet was not always so named. The name that it once bore had been, as every child knows, stricken from the records, actual and mental, of the Universe. It is well that evil should not be remembered. But in order that this history may be clear in the centuries to come, my record should go back to beginnings.

So far as the Universe is concerned, the history of the Forgotten Planet begins with the visit of the first craft ever to span the space between the worlds: the crude, adventuresome *Edorn*, whose name, as well as the names of the nine Zenians who manned her, occupy the highest places in the roll of honor of the Universe.

Ame Baove, the commander and historian of the *Edorn*, made but brief comment on his stop at the Forgotten Planet. I shall record it in full:

"We came to rest upon the surface of this, the fourth of the planets visited during the first trip of the *Edorn*, eighteen spaces before the height

of the sun. We found ourselves surrounded immediately by vast numbers of creatures very different from ourselves, and from their expressions and gestures, we gathered that they were both curious and unfriendly.

"Careful analysis of the atmosphere proved it to be sufficiently similar to our own to make it possible for us to again stretch our legs outside the rather cramped quarters of the *Edorn*, and tread the soil of still another world.

"No sooner had we emerged, however, than we were angrily beset by the people of this unfriendly planet, and rather than do them injury, we retired immediately, and concluded our brief observations through our ports.

"The topography of this planet is similar to our own, save that there are no mountains, and the flora is highly colored almost without exception, and apparently quite largely parasitical in nature. The people are rather short in stature, with hairless heads and high foreheads. Instead of being round or oval, however, the heads of these people rise to a rounded ridge which runs back from a point between and just above the eyes, nearly to the nape of the neck behind. They give evidence of a fair order of intelligence, but are suspicious and unfriendly. From the number and size of the cities we saw, this planet is evidently thickly populated.

"We left about sixteen spaces before the height of the sun, and continued towards the fifth and last planet before our return to Zenia."

This report, quite naturally, caused other explorers in space to hesitate. There were so many friendly, eager worlds to visit, during the years that relations between the planets were being established, that an unfriendly people were ignored.

However, from time to time, as spaceships became perfected and more common, parties from many of the more progressive planets did call. Each of them met with the same hostile reception, and at last, shortly after the second War of the Planets, the victorious Alliance sent a fleet of the small but terrible Deuber Spheres, convoyed by four of the largest of the disintegrator ray-ships, to subjugate the Forgotten Planet.

Five great cities were destroyed, and the Control City, the seat of the government, was menaced before the surly inhabitants conceded allegiance to the Alliance. Parties of scientists, fabricators, and workmen were then landed, and a dictator was appointed.

From all the worlds of the Alliance, instruments and equipment were brought to the Forgotten Planet. A great educational system was planned and executed, the benign and kindly influence of the Alliance made every effort to improve the conditions existing on the Forgotten Planet, and to win the friendship and allegiance of these people.

For two centuries the work went on. Two centuries of bloodshed, strife, hate and disturbance. Nowhere else within the known Universe was there ill feeling. The second awful War of the Planets had at last succeeded in teaching the lesson of peace.

Two centuries of effort—wasted effort. It was near the end of the second century that my own story begins.

Commander at that time of the supercruiser *Tamon*, a Special Patrol ship of the Alliance, I was not at all surprised to receive orders from the Central Council to report at emergency speed. Special Patrol work in those days, before the advent of the present de-centralized system, was a succession of false starts, hurried recalls, and urgent, emergency orders.

I obeyed at once. In the Special Patrol service, there is no questioning orders. The planet Earth, from which I sprang, is and always has been proud of the fact that from the very beginning, her men have been picked to command the ships of the Special Patrol. No matter how dangerous, how forlorn and hopeless the mission given to a commander of a Special Patrol ship, history has never recorded that any commander has ever hesitated. That is why our uniform of blue and silver commands the respect that it does even in this day and age of softening and decadence, when men—but again an old man digresses. And perhaps it is not for me to judge.

I pointed the blunt nose of the *Tamon* at Zenia, seat of the Central Council, and in four hours, Earth time, the great craft swept over the gleaming city of the Central Council and settled swiftly to the court before the mighty, columned Hall of the Planets.

Four pages of the Council, in their white and scarlet livery, met me and conducted me instantly to a little ante-room behind the great council chamber.

There were three men awaiting me there; three men whose faces, at that time, were familiar to every person in the known Universe.

Kellen, the oldest of the three, and the spokesman, rose as I entered the room. The others did likewise, as the pages closed the heavy doors behind me.

"You are prompt, and that is good," thought Kellen. "I welcome you. Remove now thy menore."

I glanced up at him swiftly. This must surely be an important matter, that I was asked to remove my menore band.

It will, of course, be understood that at that time we had but a bulky and clumsy instrument to enable us to convey and receive thought; a device consisting of a heavy band of metal, in which were imbedded the necessary instruments and a tiny atomic energy generator, the whole being worn as a circlet or crown upon the head.

Wonderingly, I removed my menore, placed it upon the long, dark table around which the three men were standing, and bowed. Each of the three, in turn, lifted their gleaming circlets from their heads, and placed them likewise upon the table before them.

"You wonder," said Kellen, speaking of course, in the soft and liquid universal language, which is, I understand, still disseminated in our schools, as it should be. "I shall explain as quickly and as briefly as possible.

"We have called you here on a dangerous mission. A mission that will require tact and quickness of mind as well as bravery. We have selected you, have called you, because we are agreed that you possess the qualities required. Is it not so?" He glanced at his two companions, and they nodded gravely, solemnly, without speaking.

"You are a young man, John Hanson," continued Kellen, "but your record in your service is one of which you can be proud. We trust you—with

knowledge that is so secret, so precious, that we must revert to speech in order to convey it; we dare not trust it, even in this protected and guarded place, to the menore's quicker but less discreet communication."

He paused for a moment, frowning thoughtfully as though dreading to begin. I waited silently, and at last he spoke again.

"There is a world"—and he named a name which I shall not repeat, the name of the Forgotten Planet—"that is a festering sore upon the body of the Universe. As you know, for two centuries we have tried to pass on to these people an understanding of peace and friendship. I believe that nothing has been left undone. The Council and the forces behind it have done every thing within their power. And now—"

He stopped again, and there was an expression of deepest pain written upon his wise and kindly face. The pause was for but an instant.

"And now," he went on firmly, "it is at an end. Our work has been undone. Two centuries of effort—undone. They have risen in revolt, they have killed all those sent by the Alliance of which this Council is the governing body and the mouthpiece, and they have sent us an ultimatum—a threat of war!"

"What?"

Kellen nodded his magnificent old head gravely.

"I do not wonder that you start," he said heavily. "War! It must not be. It cannot be! And yet, war is what they threaten."

"But, sir!" I put in eagerly. I was young and rash in those days. "Who are they, to make war against a united Universe?"

"I have visited your planet, Earth," said Kellen, smiling very faintly. "You have a tiny winged insect you call *bee*. Is it not so?"

"Yes."

"The bee is a tiny thing, of little strength. A man, a little child, might crush one to death between a thumb and finger. But the bee may sting before he is crushed, and the sting may linger on for days, a painful and unpleasant thing. Is that not so?"

"I see, sir," I replied, somewhat abashed before the tolerant, kindly wisdom of this great man. "They cannot hope to wage successful war, but they may bring much suffering to others."

"Much suffering," nodded Kellen, still gently smiling. "And we are determined that this thing shall not be. Not"—and his face grew gray with a terrible and bitter resolve—"not if we have to bring to bear upon that dark and unwilling world the disintegrating rays of every ship of the Alliance, so that the very shell of the planet shall disappear, and no life ever again shall move upon its surface.

"But this," and he seemed to shudder at the thought, "is a terrible and a ruthless thing to even contemplate. We must first try once again to point out to them the folly of their ways. It is with this mission that we would burden you, John Hanson."

"It is no burden, but an honor, sir," I said quietly.

"Youth! Youth!" Kellen chided me gently. "Foolish, yet rather glorious. Let me tell you the rest, and then we shall ask for your reply again."

"The news came to us by a small scout ship attached to that unhappy world,

It barely made the journey to Jaron, the nearest planet, and crashed so badly, from lack of power, that all save one man were killed.

"He luckily tore off his menore, and insisted in speech that he be brought here. He was obeyed, and, in a dying condition, was brought to this very chamber." Kellen glanced swiftly, sadly, around the room, as though he could still visualize that scene.

"Every agent of the Alliance upon that hateful planet was set upon and killed, following the working out of some gigantic and perfectly executed plan—all save the crew of this one tiny scout ship, which was spared to act as a messenger.

"Tell your great Council," was the message these people sent to us, "that here is rebellion. We do not want, nor will we tolerate, your peace. We have learned now that upon other worlds than ours there are great riches. These we shall take. If there is resistance, we have a new and a terrible death to deal. A death that your great scientists will be helpless against; a horrible and irresistible death that will make desolate and devoid of intelligent life any world where we are forced to sow the seeds of ultimate disaster.

"We are not yet ready. If we were, we would not move, for we prefer that your Council have time to think about what is surely to come. If you doubt that we have the power to do what we have threatened to do, send one ship, commanded by a man whose word you will trust, and we will prove to him that these are no empty words."

"That, as nearly as I can remember it," concluded Kellen, "is the message. The man who brought it died almost before he had finished.

"That is the message. You are the man we have picked to accept their challenge. Remember, though, that there are but the four of us in this room. There are but four of us who know these things. If you for any reason do not wish to accept this mission, there will be none to judge you, least of all, any one of us, who know best of all the perils."

"You say, sir," I said quietly, although my heart was pounding in my throat, and roaring in my ears, "that there would be none to judge me.

"Sir, there would be myself. There could be no more merciless judge. I am honored that I have been selected for this task, and I accept the responsibility willingly, gladly. When is it your wish that we should start?"

The three presiding members of the Council glanced at each other, faintly smiling, as though they would say, as Kellen had said a short time before: "Youth! Youth!" Yet I believe they were glad and somewhat proud that I had replied as I did.

"You may start," said Kellen, "as soon as you can complete the necessary preparations. Detailed instructions will be given you later."

He bowed to me, and the others did likewise. Then Kellen picked up his menore and adjusted it.

The interview was over.

"What do you make it?" I asked the observer. He glanced up from his instrument.

"Jaron, sir. Three degrees to port; elevation between five and six degrees. Approximate only, of course, sir."

"Good enough. Please ask Mr. Barry to hold to his present course. We shall not stop at Jaron."

The observer glanced at me curiously, but he was too well disciplined to hesitate or ask questions.

"Yes, sir!" he said crisply, and spoke into the microphone beside him.

None of us wore menores when on duty, for several reasons. Our instruments were not nearly as perfect as those in use to-day, and verbal orders were clearer and carried more authority than mental instructions. The delicate and powerful electrical and atomic mechanism of our ship interfered with the functioning of the menores, and at that time the old habit of speech was far more firmly entrenched, due to hereditary influence, than it is now.

I nodded to the man, and made my way to my own quarters. I wished most heartily that I could talk over my plans with someone, but this had been expressly forbidden.

"I realize that you trust your men, and more particularly your officers," Kellen had told me during the course of his parting conversation with me. "I trust them also—yet we must remember that the peace of mind of the Universe is concerned. If news, even a rumor, of this threatened disaster should become known, it is impossible to predict the disturbance it might create.

"Say nothing to anyone. It is your problem. You alone should leave the ship when you land; you alone shall hear or see the evidence they have to present, and you alone shall bring word of it to us. That is the wish of the Council."

"Then it is my wish," I had said, and so it had been settled.

Aft, in the crew's quarters, a gong sounded sharply; the signal for changing watches, and the beginning of a sleep period. I glanced at the remote control dials that glowed behind their glass panel on one side of my room. From the registered attraction of Jaron, at our present speed, we should be passing her within, according to Earth time, about two hours. That meant that their outer patrols might be seeking our business, and I touched Barry's attention button, and spoke into the microphone beside my bunk.

"Mr. Barry? I am turning in for a little sleep. Before you turn over the watch to Eitel, will you see that the nose rays are set for the Special Patrol code signal for this enar? We shall be close to Jaron shortly."

"Yes, sir! Any other orders?"

"No. Keep her on her present course. I shall take the watch from Mr. Eitel."

Since there have been changes since those days, and will undoubtedly be others in the future, it might be well to make clear, in a document such as this, that at this period, all ships of the Special Patrol Service identified themselves by means of invisible rays flashed in certain sequences, from the two nose, or forward, projectors. These code signals were changed every enar, a period of time arbitrarily set by the Council; about eighteen days, as time is measured on the Earth, and divided into ten periods, as at present known as enarens. These were further divided into enaros, thus giving us a time-

reckoning system for use in space, corresponding roughly to the months, days and hours of the Earth.

I retired, but not to sleep. Sleep would not come. I knew, of course, that if curious outer patrol ships from Jaron did investigate us, they would be able to detect our invisible ray code signal, and thus satisfy themselves that we were on the Council's business. There would be no difficulty on that score. But what I should do after landing upon the rebellious sphere, I had not the slightest idea.

"Be stern, indifferent to their threats," Kellen had counseled me, "but do everything within your power to make them see the folly of their attitude. Do not threaten them, for they are a surly people, and you might precipitate matters. Swallow your pride if you must; remember that yours is a gigantic responsibility, and upon the information you bring us may depend the salvation of millions. I am convinced that they are not—you have a word in your language that fits exactly. Not pretending . . . what is the word?"

"Bluffing?" I had supplied in English, smiling.

"Right! Bluffing. It is a very descriptive word. I am sure they are not bluffing."

I was sure of it also. They knew the power of the Alliance; they had been made to feel it more than once. A bluff would have been a foolish thing, and these people were not fools. In some lines of research they were extraordinarily brilliant.

But what could their new, terrible weapon be? Rays we had; at least half a dozen rays of destruction; the terrible dehydrating ray of the Deuber Spheres, the disintegrating ray that dated back before Ame Baove and his first first voyage into space, the concentrated ultra-violet ray that struck men down in fiery torment. . . . No, it could hardly be a new ray that was their boasted weapon.

What, then? Electricity had even then been exhausted of its possibilities. Atomic energy had been released, harnessed, and directed. Yet it would take fabulous time and expense to make these machines of destruction do what they claimed they would do.

Still pondering the problem, I did fall at last into a fitful travesty of sleep.

I was glad when the soft clamor of the bell aft announced the next change of watch. I rose, cleared the cobwebs from my brain with an icy shower, and made my way directly to the navigating room.

"Everything tidy, sir," said Eitel, my second officer, and a Zenian. He was thin and very dark, like all Zenians, and had the high, effeminate voice of that people. But he was cool and fearless and had the uncanny cerebration of his kind; I trusted him as completely as I trusted Barry, my first officer, who, like myself, was a native of Earth. "Will you take over?"

"Yes," I nodded, glancing at the twin charts beneath the ground glass top of the control table. "Get what sleep you can the next few enaros. Presently I shall want every man on duty and at his station."

He glanced at me curiously, as the observer had done, but saluted and left with only a brief, "Yes, sir!" I returned the salute and turned my attention again to the charts.

The navigating room of an interplanetary ship is without doubt unfamiliar ground to most, so it might be well for me to say that such ships have, for the most part, twin charts, showing progress in two dimensions; to use land terms, lateral and vertical. These charts are really no more than large sheets of ground glass, ruled in both directions with fine black lines, representing all relatively close heavenly bodies by green lights of varying sizes. The ship itself is represented by a red spark, and the whole is, of course, entirely automatic in action, the instruments comprising the chart being operated by super-radio reflexes.

Jaron, the charts showed me at a glance, was now far behind. Almost directly above—it is necessary to resort to these unscientific terms to make my meaning clear—was the tiny world Elon, home of the friendly but impossibly dull winged people, the only ones in the known Universe. I was there but once, and found them almost laughably like our common dragonflies on Earth; dragon-flies that grow some seven feet long, and with gauzy wings of amazing strength.

Directly ahead, on both charts, was a brilliantly glowing sphere of green—our destination. I made some rapid mental calculations, studying the few fine black lines between the red spark that was our ship, and the nearest edge of the great green sphere. I glanced at our speed indicator and the attraction meter. The little red slide that moved around the rim of the attraction meter was squarely at the top, showing that the attraction was from straight ahead; the great black hand was nearly a third of the way around the face.

We were very close; two hours would bring us into the atmospheric envelope. In less than two hours and a half, we would be in the Control City of what is now called the Forgotten Planet!

I glanced forward, through the thick glass partitions, into the operating room. Three men stood there, watching intently; they too, were wondering why we visited the unfriendly world.

The planet itself loomed up straight ahead, a great half-circle, its curved rim sharp and bright against the empty blackness of space; the chord ragged and blurred. In two hours. . . . I turned away and began a restless pacing.

An hour went by; an hour and a half. I pressed the attention button to the operating room, and gave orders to reduce our speed by half. We were very close to the outer fringe of the atmospheric envelope. Then, keeping my eye on the big surface-temperature gauge, with its stubby red hand, I resumed my nervous pacing.

Slowly the thick red hand of the surface-temperature gauge began to move; slowly, and then more rapidly, until the eyes could catch its creeping.

"Reduce to atmospheric speed," I ordered curtly, and glanced down through a side port at one end of the long navigating room.

We were, at the moment, directly above the twilight belt. To my right, as I looked down, I could see a portion of the glistening antarctic ice cap. Here and there were the great flat lakes, almost seas, of the planet.

Our geographies of the Universe today do not show the topography of the Forgotten Planet; I might say, therefore, that the entire sphere was land area, with numerous great lakes embedded in its surface, together with

many broad, very crooked rivers. As Ame Baove had reported, there were no mountains, and no high land.

"Altitude constant," I ordered. "Port three degrees. Stand by for further orders."

The earth seemed to whirl slowly beneath us. Great cities drifted astern, and I compared the scene below me with the great maps I took from our chart-case. The Control City should be just beyond the visible rim; well in the daylight area.

"Port five degrees," I said, and pressed the attention button to Barry's quarters.

"Mr. Barry, please call all men to quarters, including the off-duty watch, and then report to the navigating room. Mr. Eitel will be under my direct orders. We shall descend within the next few minutes."

"Very well, sir."

I pressed the attention button to Eitel's room.

"Mr. Eitel, please pick ten of your best men and have them report at the forward exit. Await me, with the men, at that place. I shall be with you as soon as I turn the command over to Mr. Barry. We are descending immediately."

"Right, sir!" said Eitel.

I turned from the microphone to find that Barry had just entered the navigating room.

"We will descend into the Great Court of the Control City, Mr. Barry," I said. "I have a mission here. I am sorry, but these are the only instructions I can leave you.

"I do not know how long I shall be gone from the ship, but if I do not return within three hours, depart without me, and report directly to Kellen of the Council. To him, and no other. Tell him, verbally, what took place. Should there be any concerted action against the *Tamon*, use your own judgment as to the action to be taken, remembering that the safety of the ship and its crew, and the report to the Council, are infinitely more important than my personal welfare. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir. Too damned clear."

I smiled and shook my head.

"Don't worry," I said lightly. "I'll be back well within the appointed time."

"I hope so. But there's something wrong as hell here. I'm talking now as man to man; not to my commanding officer. I've been watching below, and I have seen at least two spots where large numbers of our ships have been destroyed. The remaining ships bear their own damned emblem where the crest of the Alliance should be—and was. What does it mean?"

"It means," I said slowly, "that I shall have to rely upon every man and officer to forget himself and myself, and obey orders without hesitation and without flinching. The orders are not mine, but direct from the Council itself." I held out my hand to him—an ancient Earth gesture of greeting, good-will and farewell—and he shook it vigorously.

"God go with you," he said softly, and with a little nod of thanks I turned and quickly left the room.

Eitel, with his ten men, were waiting for me at the forward exit. The men fell back a few paces and came to attention; Eitel saluted smartly.

"We are ready, sir. What are your orders?"

"You are to guard this opening. Under no circumstances is anyone to enter save myself. I shall be gone not longer than three hours; if I am not back within that time, Mr. Barry has his orders. The exit will be sealed and the *Tamon* will depart immediately, without me."

"Yes, sir. You will pardon me, but I gather that your mission is a dangerous one. May I not accompany you?"

I shook my head.

"I shall need you here."

"But, sir, they are very excited and angry; I have been watching them from the observation ports. And there is a vast crowd of them around the ship."

"I had expected that. I thank you for your concern, but I must go alone. Those are the orders. Will you unseal the exit?"

His "Yes, sir!" was brisk and efficient, but there was a worried frown on his features as he unlocked and released the switch that opened the exit.

The huge plug of metal, some ten feet in diameter, revolved swiftly and noiselessly, backing slowly in its fine threads into the interior of the ship, gripped by the ponderous gimbals which, as the last threads disengaged, swung the mighty disc to one side, like the door of some great safe.

"Remember your orders," I smiled, and with a little gesture to convey an assurance which I certainly did not feel, I strode through the circular opening out into the crowd. The heavy glass secondary door shot down behind me, and I was in the hands of the enemy.

The first thing I observed was that my menore, which I had picked up on my way to the exit, was not functioning. Not a person in all that vast multitude wore a menore; the five black-robed dignitaries who marched to meet me wore none.

Nothing could have showed more clearly that I was in for trouble. To invite a visitor, as Kellen had done, to remove his menore first, was, of course, a polite and courteous thing to do if one wished to communicate by speech; to remove the menore before greeting a visitor wearing one, was a tacit admission of rank enmity; a confession that one's thoughts were to be concealed.

My first impulse was to snatch off my own instrument and fling it in the solemn, ugly faces of the nearest of the five dignitaries; I remembered Kellen's warning just in time. Quietly, I removed the metal circlet and tucked it under my arm, bowing slightly to the committee of five as I did so.

"I am Ja Ben," said the first of the five, with an evil grin. "You are the representative of the Council that we commanded to appear?"

"I am John Hanson, commander of the ship *Tamon* of the Special Patrol Service. I am here to represent the Central Council," I replied with dignity.

"As we commanded," grinned Ja Ben. "That is good. Follow us and you shall have the evidence you were promised."

Ja Ben led the way with two of his black-robed followers. The other two

fell in behind me. A virtual prisoner, I marched between them, through the vast crowd that made way grudgingly to let us pass.

I have seen the people of most of the planets of the known Universe. Many of them, to Earth notions, are odd. But these people, so much like us in many respects, were strangely repulsive.

Their heads, as Ame Baove had recorded, were not round like ours, but possessed a high bony crest that ran from between their lashless, browless eyes, down to the very nape of their necks. Their skin, even that covering their hairless heads, was a dull and papery white, like parchment, and their eyes were abnormally small, and nearly round. A hateful, ugly people, perpetually scowling, snarling; their very voices resembled more the growl of wild beasts than the speech of intelligent beings.

Ja Ben led the way straight to the low but vast building of dun-colored stone that I knew was the administration building of the Control City. We marched up the broad, crowded steps, through the muttering, jeering multitude, into the building itself. The guards at the doors stood aside to let us through and the crowd at last was left behind.

A swift, cylindrical elevator shot us upward, into a great glass-walled laboratory, built like a sort of penthouse on the roof. Ja Ben walked quickly across the room towards a long, glass-topped table; the other four closed in on me silently but suggestively.

"That is unnecessary," I said quietly. "See, I am unarmed and completely in your power. I am here as an ambassador of the Central Council, not as a warrior."

"Which is as well for you," grinned Ja Ben. "What I have to show you, you can see quickly, and then depart."

From a great cabinet in one corner of the room he took a shining cylinder of dark red metal, and held it up before him, stroking its sleek sides with an affectionate hand.

"Here it is," he said, chuckling. "The secret of our power. In here, safely imprisoned now, but capable of being released at our command, is death for every living thing upon any planet we choose to destroy." He replaced the great cylinder in the cabinet, and picked up in its stead a tiny vial of the same metal, no larger than my little finger, and not so long. "Here," he said, turning again towards me, "is the means of proving our power to you. Come closer!"

With my bodyguard of four watching every move, I approached.

Ja Ben selected a large hollow hemisphere of crystal glass and placed it upon a smooth sheet of flat glass. Next he picked a few blossoms from a bowl that stood, incongruously enough, on the table, and threw them under the glass hemisphere.

"Flora," he grinned.

Hurrying to the other end of the room, he reached into a large flat metal cage and brought forth three small rodent-like animals, natives of that world. These he also tossed carelessly under the glass.

"Fauna," he grunted, and picked up the tiny metal vial.

One end of the vial unscrewed. He turned the cap gently, carefully, a

strained, anxious look upon his face. My four guards watched him breathlessly, fearfully.

The cap came loose at last, disclosing the end of the tube, sealed with a grayish substance that looked like wax. Very quickly Ja Ben rolled the little cylinder under the glass hemisphere, and picked up a beaker that had been bubbling gently on an electric plate close by. Swiftly he poured the thick contents of the beaker around the base of the glass bell. The stuff hardened almost instantly, forming an air-tight seal between the glass hemisphere and the flat plate of glass upon which it rested. Then, with an evil, triumphant smile, Ja Ben looked up.

"*Flora*," he repeated. "*Fauna*. And *death*. Watch! The little metal cylinder is plugged still, but in a moment that plug will disappear—simply a volatile solid, you understand. It is going rapidly . . . rapidly . . . it is almost gone now! Watch. . . . In an instant now . . . ah!"

I saw the gray substance that stopped the entrance of the little metal vial disappear. The rodents ran around and over it, trying to find a crevice by which they might escape. The flowers, bright and beautiful, lay untidily on the bottom of the glass prison.

Then, just as the last vestige of the gray plug vanished, an amazing, a terrible thing happened. At the mouth of the tiny metal vial a greenish cloud appeared. I call it a cloud, but it was not that. It was solid, and it spread in every direction, sending out little needles that lashed about and ran together into a solid mass while millions of little needles reached out swiftly.

One of these little needles touched a scurrying animal. Instantly the tiny brute stiffened, and from his entire body the greenish needles spread swiftly. One of the flowers turned suddenly thick and pulpy with the soft green mass, then another, another of the rodents . . . *God!*

In the space of two heart beats, the entire hemisphere was filled with the green mass, that still moved and writhed and seemed to press against the glass sides as though the urge to expand was insistent, imperative. . . .

"What is it?" I whispered, still staring at the thing.

"*Death!*" grunted Ja Ben, thrusting his hateful face close to mine, his tiny round eyes, with their lashless lids glinting. "Death, my friend. Go and tell your great Council of this death that we have created for every planet that will not obey us.

"We have gone back into the history of dealing death and have come back with a death such as the Universe has never known before!

"Here is a rapacious, deadly fungus we have been two centuries in developing. The spores contained in that tiny metal tube would be invisible to the naked eye—and yet given but a little time to grow with air and vegetation and flesh to feed upon, and even that small capsule would wipe out a world. And in the cabinet,"—he pointed grinning triumphantly—"we have, ready for instant use, enough of the spores of this deadly fungus to wipe out all the worlds of your great Alliance."

"To wipe them out utterly!" he repeated, his voice shaking with a sort of frenzy now. "Every living thing upon their faces, wrapped in that thin, hungry green stuff you see there under that glass. All life wiped out; made

uninhabitable so long as the Universe shall endure. And we—we shall be rulers, unquestioned, of that Universe. Tell your doddering Council that!" He leaned back against the table, panting with hate.

"I shall tell them all I have seen; all you have said," I nodded.

"You believe we have the power to do all this?"

"I do—God help me, and the Universe," I said solemnly.

There was no doubt in my mind. I could see all too clearly how well their plans had been laid; how quickly this hellish growth would strangle all life, once its spores began to develop.

The only possible chance was to get back to the Council and make my report, with all possible speed, so that every available armed ship of the universe might concentrate here, and wipe out these people before they had time to—

"I know what you are thinking, my friend," broke in Ja Ben mockingly. "You might as well have worn the menore! You would have the ships of the Alliance destroy us before we have time to act. We had foreseen that, and have provided for the possibility."

"As soon as you leave here, ships, provided with many tubes like the one just used for our little demonstration, will be dispersed in every direction. We shall be in constant communication with those ships, and at the least sign of hostility, they will be ordered to depart and spread their death upon every world they can reach. Some of them you may be able to locate and eliminate; a number of them are certain to elude capture in infinite space—and if only one, one lone ship, should escape, the doom of the Alliance and millions upon millions of people will be pronounced."

"I warn you, it will be better, much better, to bow to our wishes, and pay us the tribute we shall demand. Any attempt at resistance will precipitate certain disaster for your Council and all the worlds the Council governs."

"At least, we would wipe you out first," I said hoarsely.

"True," nodded Ja Ben. "But the vengeance of our ships would be a terrible thing! You would not dare to take the chance!"

I stood there, staring at him in a sort of daze. What he had said was so true; terribly, damnably true.

If only—

There was but one chance I could see, and desperate as it was, I took it. Whirling the heavy metal ring of my menore in my hand, I sprang towards the table.

If I could break the sealed glass hemisphere, and loose the fungus upon its creators; deal to them the doom they had planned for the universe, then perhaps all might yet be well.

Ja Ben understood instantly what was in my mind. He and his four aides leaped between me and the table, their tiny round eyes blazing with anger. I struck one of the four viciously with the menore, and with a gasp he fell back and slumped to the floor.

Before I could break through the opening, however, Ja Ben struck me full in the face with his mighty fist; a blow that sent me, dazed and reeling, into a corner of the room. I brought up with a crash against the cabinet

there, groped wildly in an effort to steady my self, and fell to the floor. Almost before I struck, all four of them were upon me.

They hammered me viciously, shouted at me, cursed me in the universal tongue, but I paid no heed. I pretended to be unconscious, but my heart was beating high with sudden, glorious hope, and in my brain a terrible, merciless plan was forming.

When I had groped against the cabinet in an effort to regain my balance, my fingers had closed upon one of the little metal vials. As I fell, I covered that hand with my body and hastily hid the tiny tube in a deep pocket of my blue and silver Service uniform.

Slowly, after a few seconds, I opened my eyes and looked up at them, helplessly.

"Go, now!" snarled Ja Ben, dragging me to my feet. "Go, and tell your Council we are more than a match for you—and for them." He thrust me, reeling, towards his three assistants. "Take him to his ship, and send aid for Ife Rance, here." He glanced at the still unconscious figure of the victim of my menore, and then turned to me with a last warning.

"Remember, one thing more, my friend: you have disintegrator ray equipment upon your ship. You have the little atomic bombs that won for the Alliance the Second War of the Planets. I know that. But if you make the slightest effort to use them, I shall dispatch a supply of the green death to our ships, and they will depart upon their missions at once. You would take upon yourself a terrible responsibility by making the smallest hostile move."

"Go, now—and when you return, bring with you members of your great Council who will have the power to hear our demands, and see that they are obeyed. And do not keep us waiting overlong, for we are an impatient race." He bowed, mockingly, and passed his left hand swiftly before his face, his people's sign of parting.

I nodded, not trusting myself to speak, and, hemmed in by my three black-robed conductors, was hurried down the elevator and back through the jeering mob to my ship.

The glass secondary door shot up to permit me to enter, and Eitel gripped my shoulder anxiously, his eyes smoldering angrily.

"You're hurt, sir!" he said in his odd, high-pitched voice, staring into my bruised face. "What—"

"It's nothing," I assured him. "Close the exit immediately; we depart at once."

"Yes, sir!" He closed the switch, and the great threaded plug swung gently on its gimbals and began to revolve, swiftly and silently. A little bell sounded sharply, and the great door ceased its motion. Eitel locked the switch and returned the key to his pocket.

"Good. All men are at their stations?" I asked briskly.

"Yes, sir! All except these ten, detailed to guard the exit."

"Have them report to their regular stations. Issue orders to the ray operators that they are to instantly, and without further orders, destroy any ship that may leave the surface of this planet. Have every atomic bomb crew ready for an instant and concentrated offensive directed at the Control City,

but command them not to act under any circumstances unless I give the order. Is that clear, Mr. Eitel?"

"Yes, sir!"

I nodded, and turned away, making my way immediately to the navigating room.

"Mr. Barry," I said quickly and gravely, "I believe that the fate of the known Universe depends upon us at this moment. We will ascend vertically, at once—slowly—until we are just outside the envelope, maintaining only sufficient horizontal motion to keep us directly over the Control City. Will you give the necessary orders?"

"Immediately, sir!" He pressed the attention button to the operating room and spoke swiftly into the microphone; before he completed the order I had left.

We were already ascending when I reached the port forward atomic bomb station. The man in charge, a Zenian, saluted with automatic precision and awaited orders.

"You have a bomb in readiness?" I asked, returning the salute.

"Those were my orders, sir."

"Correct. Remove it, please."

I waited impatiently while the crew removed the bomb from the releasing trap. It was withdrawn at last; a fish-shaped affair, very much like the ancient airplane bombs save that it was no larger than my two fists, placed one upon the other, and that it had four silvery wires running along its sides, from rounded nose to pointed tail, held at a distance from the body by a series of insulating struts.

"Now," I said, "how quickly can you put another object in the trap, re-seal the opening, and release the object?"

"While the Commander counts ten with reasonable speed," said the Zenian with pride. "We won first honors in the Special Patrol Service contests at the last Examination, the Commander may remember."

"I do remember. That is why I selected you for this duty."

With hands that trembled a little, I think, I drew forth the little vial of gleaming red metal, while the bombing crew watched me curiously.

"I shall unscrew the cap from this little vial," I explained, "and drop it immediately into the releasing trap. Re-seal the trap and release this object as quickly as it is possible to do so. If you can better the time you made to win the honors at the Examination—in God's name, do so!"

"Yes, sir!" replied the Zenian. He gave brisk orders to his crew, and each of the three men sprang alertly into position.

As quickly as I could, I turned off the cap of the little metal vial and dropped it into the trap. The heavy plug, a tiny duplicate of the exit door, clicked shut upon it and spun, whining gently, into the opening. Something clicked sharply, and one of the crew dropped a bar into place. As it shot home, the Zenian in command of the crew pulled the release plunger.

"Done, sir!" he said proudly.

I did not reply. My eye fixed upon the observation tube that was following the tiny missile to the ground.

The Control City was directly below us. I lost sight of the vial almost instantly, but the indicating cross-hairs showed me exactly where the vial would strike; at a point approximately half way between the edge of the city and the great squat pile of the administrating building, with its gleaming glass penthouse—the laboratory in which, only a few minutes before, I had witnessed the demonstration of the death which awaited the Universe.

"Excellent!" I exclaimed. "Smartly done, men!" I turned and hurried to the navigating room, where the most powerful of our television discs was located.

The disc was not as perfect as those we have to-day; it was hooded to keep out exterior light, which is not necessary with the later instruments, and it was more unwieldy. However, it did its work, and did it well, in the hands of an experienced operator.

With only a nod to Barry, I turned the range hand to maximum, and brought it swiftly to bear upon that portion of the city in which the little vial had fallen. As I drew the focusing lever towards me, the scene leaped at me through the clear, glowing glass disc.

Froth! Green, billowing froth that grew and boiled and spread unceasingly. In places it reached high into the air, and it moved with an eager, inner life that was somehow terrible and revolting. I moved the range hand back, and the view seemed to drop away from me swiftly.

I could see the whole city now. All one side of it was covered with the spreading green stain that moved and flowed so swiftly. Thousands of tiny black figures were running in the streets, crowding away from the awful danger that menaced them.

The green patch spread more swiftly all ways. When I had first seen it, the edges were advancing as rapidly as a man could run; now they were fairly racing, and the speed grew constantly.

A ship, two of them, three of them, came darting from somewhere, towards the administration building, with its glass cupola. I held my breath as the deep, sudden humming from the *Tamon* told me that our rays were busy. Would they—

One of the enemy ships disappeared suddenly in a little cloud of dirty, heavy dust that settled swiftly. Another . . . and the third. Three little streaks of dust, falling, falling. . . .

A fourth ship, and a fifth came rushing up, their sides faintly glowing from the speed they had made. The green flood, thick and insistent, was racing up and over the administration building now. It reached the roof, ran swiftly. . . .

The fourth ship shattered into dust. The fifth settled swiftly—and then that ship also disappeared, together with a corner of the building. Then the thick green stuff flowed over the whole building and there was nothing to be seen there but a mound of soft, flowing, gray-green stuff that rushed on now with the swiftness of the wind.

I looked up, into Barry's face.

"You're ill!" he said quickly. "Is there anything I can do, sir?"

"Yes," I said, forming the words with difficulty. "Give orders to ascend at emergency speed!"

For once my first officer hesitated. He glanced at the attraction meter and then turned to me again, wondering.

"At this height, sir, emergency speed will mean dangerous heating of the surface; perhaps—"

"I want it white hot, Mr. Barry. She is built to stand it. Emergency speed, please—immediately!"

"Right, sir!" he said briskly, and gave the order.

I felt my weight increase as the order was obeyed; gradually the familiar, uncomfortable feeling left me. Silently, Barry and I watched the big surface temperature gauge as it started to move. The heat inside became uncomfortable, grew intense. The sweat poured from us. In the operating room, forward, I could see the man casting quick, wondering glances up at us through the heavy glass partition that lay between.

The thick, stubby red hand of the surface temperature gauge moved slowly but steadily towards the heavy red line that marked the temperature at which the outer shell of our hull would become incandescent. The hand was within three or four degrees of that mark when I gave Barry the order to arrest our motion.

When he had given the order, I turned to him and motioned towards the television disc.

"Look," I said.

He looked, and when at last he tore his face away from the hood, he seemed ten years older.

"What is it?" he asked in a choked whisper. "Why—they're being wiped out; the whole of that world—"

"True. And some of the seeds of that terrible death might have drifted upward, and found a lodging place upon the surface of our ship. That is why I ordered the emergency speed while we were still within the atmospheric envelope, Barry. To burn away that contamination, if it existed. Now we are safe, unless—"

I pressed the attention button to the station of the chief of the ray operators.

"Your report," I ordered.

"Nine ships disintegrated, sir," he replied instantly. "Five before the city was destroyed; four later."

"You are certain that none escaped?"

"Positive, sir."

"Very good."

I turned to Barry, smiling.

"Point her nose for Zenia, Mr. Barry," I said. "As soon as it is feasible, resume emergency speed. There are some very anxious gentlemen there awaiting our report, and I dare not convey it except in person."

"Yes, sir!" said Barry crisply.

This, then, is the history of the Forgotten Planet. On the charts of the Universe it appears as an unnamed world. No ship is permitted to pass

closc enough to it so that its attraction is greater than that of the nearest other mass. A permanent outpost of fixed-station ships, with headquarters upon Jaron, the closest world, is maintained by the Council.

There are millions of people who might be greatly disturbed if they knew of this potential menace that lurks in the midst of our Universe, but they do not know. The wisdom of the Council made certain of that.

But, in order that in the ages to come there might be a record of this matter, I have been asked to prepare this document for the sealed archives of the Alliance. It has been a pleasant task; I have relived, for a little time, a part of my youth.

The work is done, now, and that is well. I am an old man, and weary. Sometimes I wish I might live to see the wonders that the next generation or so will witness, but my years are heavy upon me.

My work is done.

# *The Curious Case of Norton Hoorne*

by Ray Cummings

Back thirty years ago when Argosy All-Story was the best-liked adventure fiction weekly in the land, when a story came in that didn't fit the standard categories of Western, Detective, Adventure, or Sport, the editor would label it "A 'Different' Story" and run that phrase right under the title. It was these "different" stories which were the forerunners of modern fantasy, they were the seeds which grew into Weird Tales and Amazing Stories. One of the finds made then was a new writer named Ray Cummings who began to contribute unusual off-trail stories with increasing regularity. "*The Curious Case of Norton Hoorne*" bore the label "Different." The reader will find it still justifies that designation.

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DO NOT FEEL that now, after these many years, it is any breach of professional etiquette for me to relate the case of Norton Hoorne. It was so remarkable, so extraordinary an incident, that it seems wrong to let it lie forever buried in the professional secrecy to which my good friend, the late Dr. Johns, consigned it. And so now, after nearly twenty years, I have decided to give my remembrance of the events just as they occurred.

I attempt no explanation. I am not psychic. Indeed, I know very little of the subject, for it is not one that appeals to me. I have never seen a ghost, nor have I ever talked with any one who had. You who read this may explain it as you will. I shall merely set down for you the plain facts; and if, by so doing, I shall have added anything of value to the existing data on Psychical Research, I shall be amply repaid.

At the time the incidents occurred, I remember, I had just taken my medical degree. My mother had wanted me to become a musician. I was, and in fact always have been, tremendously interested in music. But the career of professional pianist, for it was that branch of the art to which I leaned, seemed to hold little promise for a youth whose talent obviously fell far short of genius, so I decided upon the medical profession instead.

At the time I took my degree I had two friends who meant a great deal to my life. They were Dr. Johns and Norton Hoorne, the latter one of the most famous concert pianists in the country. The friendship of these two men, and the inspiration I derived from them both, was the biggest thing in my life at this period—excepting possibly my interest in my work.

It was in the spring of 1900, I remember, that Dr. Johns and I attended one of Hoorne's concerts in New York. I know we were both proud, as we sat in that huge, enthusiastic audience, to feel we were the closest friends of such a man.

Norton Hoorne was at this time at the very pinnacle of his fame. He was about thirty-five years of age—a most picturesque figure, tall and straight, with very black wavy hair slightly touched with gray at the temples. His features were strong—almost rugged. Yet his mouth was sensitive as a girl's, and his face, for all its sturdy strength, was the face of a poet. He had never married, but lived alone in his luxurious studio on Riverside Drive with an old housekeeper who was devoted to him.

Hoorne was unquestionably a great artist. But we knew him also as a great man—a man big mentally, physically and spiritually; had he been otherwise the events I am about to relate might have been less inexplicable.

I think it was hardly two or three days after the concert that Dr. Johns called me up one morning shortly after breakfast.

"Something has happened," he explained hurriedly. "Norton's housekeeper has just phoned me. Will you come right up to his studio?"

Then he hung up without waiting for me to reply.

When I arrived I was ushered in at once by the frightened housekeeper. She took me immediately to the studio and I found Dr. Johns already there. He led me across the room without a word and pointed to the grand piano that stood in a corner by the window. On the bench before it sat Norton Hoorne, his body sprawled forward over the keyboard of the instrument.

How curious it is, that in moments of great mental stress little details impress themselves upon one's mind that in other times would pass unnoticed! I can remember the scene in Hoorne's studio that morning as though it had happened yesterday. It was a luxurious room, in perfect order now as always. Large French windows opened onto the Drive, and by the piano stood a many-pillowed divan where frequently I had lain and listened to Hoorne's playing.

Dr. John's had arrived but a short while before, and now in a few words he told me what had happened as far as he knew it. Hoorne was not dead as I had supposed by my first hurried glance, but was in a most extraordinary state of catalepsy. There was absolutely no sign of life except in so far as there was also no positive sign of death. Both pulse and respiration apparently had ceased.

We lifted our friend from his position at the piano and laid him prone upon the divan. Dr. Johns had not wanted to move him, he said, until I arrived. I had a dozen horrified questions to ask, but he would have none of them. I could see by his manner that he knew, or suspected, the cause of Hoorne's condition. And because he wished it so, I questioned no more, but helped him with his further examination.

When we had finished, at his request, I summoned the housekeeper. The poor woman came at once; she was frightened almost out of her wits and was crying softly.

"Did Mr. Hoorne have his dinner here last evening?" Dr. Johns began at once.

"Yes, sir, he did."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"You told me you did not notice he was ill?"

"No, sir, he ate very well."

"What did he do after dinner?"

"Came right up here, sir. I think he spent the first part of the evening reading."

I looked over the few books scattered on top of the library table. Lying under the electrolier I found an opened volume of Freud's Psychoanalysis, several sheets of music, and two or three operatic scores. I picked up the volume of Freud and showed it to Dr. Johns.

"Very probably," he said, and continued his questions.

"You retired about half past eight?"

"Yes, sir."

"And very soon afterward you heard Mr. Hoorne begin playing?"

"Very soon after; yes, sir."

"How long did he play?"

"I don't know, sir; I fell asleep listening to him."

Dr. Johns looked at her curiously. "Do you know anything about music?" he asked.

The housekeeper smiled a little through her tears. "I ought to, sir, I've been with Mr. Hoorne a long time."

"I know you have—yes. What sort of music was it he was playing?"

The old lady thought a moment. "I don't rightly think I can say, sir," she replied. "I don't remember he played anything I had ever heard before."

"If he had played any ordinary piece—anything in his repertoire, or those he sometimes plays for diversion—would you have recognized it?"

"Yes, sir; I think so, sir—though I might not know its name."

"But you are familiar with most of the standard pieces, aren't you?" pursued the doctor.

"I know a great many—I do love music," she added earnestly, and her eyes filled with tears again as she looked at the motionless figure on the divan.

"What about the music, Fred?" I asked impatiently.

Dr. Johns raised his hand deprecatingly. "I was just recalling a conversation I had with Norton last week. I'll tell you later." He turned back to the housekeeper who stood looking at her master with pleading eyes.

"Oh, sir," she burst out. "Isn't there something I can do? Is it right just to let him lie there? He isn't—oh, please tell me he isn't dead."

The doctor gently led her to a chair and sat her down.

"No," he said, "he isn't dead. And there's nothing we can do just now. Don't you worry too much—perhaps he's not in great danger. We were talking about the music," he went on. "What sort of music was it? Did you notice anything peculiar about it?"

"Yes, sir, I did, now that you mention it. It was very curious music, sir."

"How curious?"

"It was sort of weird, sir. I never heard anything like it before. One part of it gave me the creeps. And some of it sounded like discords, sir."

The doctor drew a long breath. "Thank you very much, Mrs. Beacon. I think that will do for now."

The housekeeper rose. "Yes, sir," she said. "And if there's anything I can do—oh, you will let me help, won't you, sir?" she pleaded.

"Yes, Mrs. Beacon, we will let you help," he answered kindly, and closed the door upon her pathetic figure.

"You know, Will," he said, turning back to me, "there's something mighty curious about this—I'm hanged if I understand it."

I was just about to reply when there happened the first of the extraordinary incidents that made this case so remarkable. I had just seated myself on the piano bench, with my back to the instrument. I remember I was leaning backward with my elbows resting on the music-ledge above the keyboard.

At Dr. John's remark I must have shifted my position slightly, for one of my elbows slipped off the rack and hit the keys with a thump, sending a crashing, jangling discord reverberating through the room. At the same instant there came a sharp rap from the floor near at hand. With the roots of my hair tingling, I turned toward the divan. Hoorne's right hand had slipped from his side to the floor, a large seal ring he wore striking sharply its polished surface. And as I looked at his face, I caught just the fleeting end of a convulsive jerk of the lips as they steadied again into immobility.

"Good God!" ejaculated Dr. Johns, as we started toward the divan. "Did you see that?"

We were both trembling violently as we examined the body. The convulsion had passed. Hoorne was in the same state of living death as before.

That was the first intimation I had of the connection of music with the case. What Dr. Johns knew and conjectured he was soon to tell me.

We were sitting beside the table, and Dr. Johns was idly fingering the volume of Freud.

"There's something mighty curious about this," he repeated slowly.

"You've some idea," I pursued, "or you wouldn't have talked to Mrs. Beacon that way."

"What I had in mind, Will," he answered, turning the leaves of the book in his hand—"you know how interested Norton was in psychic phenomena?"

"Of course."

"We were talking about it at the club a week or so ago. He confided something to me then—something he said he had never told anyone. It seems for some time he had been experimenting with a theory that through the power of a new style of music he had evolved, the soul could be transported temporarily out of its body and brought back at will. You know there are people who claim to be able to send their astral body with its soul wandering into other planes while their human body lies inert and helpless?"

"I know."

"Well, Norton said he had found that he could do just that by using certain

kinds of music. I think I offended him a little, for I must have smiled rather skeptically. At any rate he wouldn't say much more except that he was afraid of the power he had acquired. I told him I thought that it might prove inconvenient when he was playing in public some time, and he replied quite seriously that was just what he feared. He seemed to be sorry that he had told me at all—just a little sheepish at my ridicule—and I couldn't get him to say any more. He asked me not to tell you about it."

Dr. Johns hesitated.

"Go on," I urged.

"That's all he said. Only—the look in his eyes made me know there was far more to it than that. Something so personal, so intimate, he could not even tell it to me."

Silence fell between us.

"And you think—" I prompted finally.

"What do *you* think? He was probably reading Freud last night. You heard what Mrs. Beacon said about the music. And now, when you happened to hit the piano—"

Dr. Johns stopped abruptly, his face very white, and for a long time we sat and stared at each other.

"What are we going to do about it?" I asked, breaking a silence that had become oppressive.

"We've got to assume, I think," Dr. Johns said, "that Norton's theory as he told it to me has turned to fact. He has forced or lured, or whatever you might term it, his astral body away to another plane. And for some reason it does not want to or cannot get back."

In spite of the seriousness of the situation, and the intense, earnest expression on my friend's face, I could not help smiling just a little at hearing such words from the lips of a man so coldly scientific as he.

"Do you believe that?" I asked when he paused.

"What else can I believe?" he answered. "At least it is a theory that fits the facts. Norton may have been experimenting with this thing for some time. God knows how far along he got with it—what he was able to do."

We tried to discuss the matter calmly; but to us it was so gruesome a subject, so darkly mysterious, so weird, that in spite of our efforts we found ourselves frequently at the point of becoming unnerved. There had been no change whatever in the body on the divan; it remained as before in a state that was the complete simulation of death.

I do not know what feelings caused us both to avoid suggesting the obvious thing to do. I think perhaps it was the almost supernatural aspect of the incident when I had unwittingly sounded a discord from the piano that made us hesitate to repeat it.

It was Dr. Johns who voiced first what was in both our thoughts.

"Whatever else may be in doubt," he began, "one thing is clear. Music has some definite connection with Norton's condition. It is to music we must look for a solution."

"How?" I asked.

"You know a great deal about music," he replied; "we shall have to experiment."

I jumped to my feet impulsively and struck a chord on the piano. I do not know what I expected, but my heart was beating furiously as the room vibrated with the music. I turned toward the divan; the body lay motionless as before.

Dr. Johns drew a chair beside the divan and sat down, staring steadily at Hoorne's face. "Try another," he said.

I played several chords in both major and minor keys; there was no effect whatever upon the body. With a sudden inspiration I turned around and rested my elbows on the music-ledge. Then I brought one of them sharply down upon the black keys. Simultaneously with the discord came a piercing shriek, followed by a low, mumbling groan, the most hideous, horrible sound I have ever heard issue from human lips.

When I got to the divan the body was lying on its side, the knees drawn closely up to the chest. I caught a glimpse of the contorted, agonized face. Then, with a convulsive jerk the legs straightened, the face relaxed. It was as though nothing had occurred, save that now the body was lying on its side, with one of its arms still hanging down, and the hand lying limply upon the floor.

Nothing else of importance happened that morning; the body remained motionless, and we were too unnerved to try any further experiments. We pulled down the shades and sat beside the divan, looking into the placid, ghastly white face of our friend, and talking together in low tones. Occasionally Dr. Johns would jump up and begin nervously to pace up and down the room, only to drop back in his chair again after a moment.

About noon the housekeeper timidly knocked on the door and brought us lunch. Dr. Johns agreed with me that until we considered it vitally necessary we should not call in any assistance, for publicity of this character would be extremely harmful to Hoorne's career. We decided therefore to carry the case through ourselves, and cautioned Mrs. Beacon to say nothing to the servants beyond the fact that their master was very ill, with two physicians in attendance.

We both felt better when we had eaten lunch. At Dr. Johns's request Mrs. Beacon and I brought down from one of the upper bedrooms a small cot. We undressed Hoorne and laid him on it, covering him to his neck with its white counterpane. Then dismissing the tearful, almost hysterical housekeeper with another admonition to say nothing concerning her master's condition, we prepared to carry out another experiment.

It was our plan—we had discussed it all very carefully at lunch—to begin with the faintest possible musical sounds, and find by trial those that would effect the body without causing the agony we had witnessed before.

Dr. Johns sat at the bedside and I at the piano began striking chord combinations as softly as I could. It was not until I had evolved what amounted practically to a discord that a sharp exclamation from Dr. Johns made me stop abruptly.

"Remember that," he commanded. "Play that again. Louder—a little louder."

er." I doubled it with my left hand, striking it several times. An exclamation from my companion made me leave the piano and rush to his side.

"Look," he whispered; Hoorne's lips were moving, apparently trying to form words. Dr. Johns bent over him; then he straightened up and shook his head.

For over an hour we worked, trying every possible kind of music I could think of, but to no purpose; we got no further than this. Only one fact stood out plainly. The reactions the body gave were quite consistent; I could now almost anticipate the effect of my playing.

Then it occurred to me to look at the music we had found lying on the center table with the volume of Freud. The sheet music, that part of it that was in manuscript, I could tell even at first glance was like nothing I had ever seen before. It was not built upon the ordinary eight-note scale with its two whole tone intervals followed by a half tone, with which we are familiar. Perhaps it was based upon the old Chinese scale—I do not know.

One of the sheets was a composition of Debussy. There were some songs—one of them by Rimsky-Korsakow, I remember—and there was the piano-forte score of Moussorgsky's "Boris Godounov." Of this latter several pages were turned down at the corners. I opened at the places indicated and found many of the passages marked with a pencil, with penciled notations altering slightly the tempo and rhythm, and occasionally the harmony.

This music, which I found after a little practice I could play indifferently well, had far more effect upon the body than any I had hitherto been able to evolve. I played, with trembling fingers; Dr. Johns sat at the bedside, watching the effect of my music.

For some time I played, softly, haltingly. The body of Norton Hoorne, I could see it from where I sat playing, jerked convulsively. The face twitched and from the lips issued occasional heart-rending cries that were almost more than we could bear.

Then all at once there came a death-like silence. The body on the bed lay quiet. A sharp exclamation from Dr. Johns made me stop playing; in a moment I was by his side, leaning over the bed. Hoorne's lips were moving. We held our breaths, bending closer. From the lips came the sound of a low, mouthing muttering, and then the words distinctly audible:

*"It is all so useless."*

I hardly know how to describe the tone in which these words were uttered. It had the quality I might best describe as *hollow*, a cold, measured, *detached* intonation, devoid absolutely of every quality of inflection—a voice forming words but embodying no human personality. I want to make this quite clear, because I think now that this detached quality, this *lack of personality* in the voice, was significant of much that subsequently happened.

Not only was the fact that Hoorne spoke startling in itself, but the weird, unearthly tones of his voice filled me with the utmost horror. I turned and fled back to the piano, in doubt whether to wait, or resume playing.

Then I heard Dr. Johns gently asking:

*"What is all so useless?"*

There was a long pause, and then in the same ghastly voice as before came the words:

*"Nothing matters now!"*

I sat down on the piano bench, and turning, caught a glimpse of the passive, livid face on the pillow, and Dr. Johns bending over it.

"What is all so useless?" he repeated. There was no answer, though we waited a long time, with our beating hearts audible it seemed in the heaviness of the silence.

Then Dr. Johns signed me to go on playing, and for perhaps ten minutes I went over and over the themes, elaborating them at times as fancy led me.

"Stop!" called the doctor sharply; I ceased abruptly, my hands poised above the keyboard.

"Play slowly, very softly," he commanded, and as I obeyed I heard his voice in the gentle tones one uses toward a child, asking, "Can you speak now, Norton?"

A long pause and then came the answer:

*"Yes."*

"What can we do to help you?"

There was no answer.

"What can we do to help you, Norton?" repeated Dr. Johns. "Play louder," he added aside to me.

*"It is all so useless,"* said the voice, louder and stronger than before. I let my playing die down a little.

"Why is it all so useless? Why is it, Norton?" asked Dr. Johns firmly and yet almost tenderly.

There was a longer pause than usual, and then came the words,

*"So useless. So useless, because she is not here—you must not make me live."*

I do not know whether I played wrongly at this point or that it was merely from some other cause, but immediately after uttering these words the body was seized with a convulsion horrible to witness. I heard Dr. Johns's sharply indrawn breath and his muttered exclamation.

"Stop playing!" he commanded.

I did so, and hurried again to the bedside. The convulsion had ceased; the contorted face was relaxing.

"Why must we not make you live? Why, Norton?" Dr. Johns spoke almost in a whisper.

Standing directly over the bed I could see the muscles of the face as the lips parted and the words came forth.

*"Because she has gone. I cannot reach her now."*

And then a shudder seemed to pass over the entire body, and with more power than ever before the voice said:

*"The desk. Look in the desk. Use it, for God's sake use it."*

The body abruptly relaxed into immobility; we waited and waited, but there came nothing more.

That was the first we knew about the girl. On the desk stood a photograph—we had not noticed it before—in a small silver frame. It was the picture of a girl perhaps twenty-five years of age—a shy, beautiful face, with very large

wistful eyes and a mass of golden hair. She was undeniably a girl of refinement and culture. The photograph showed her in what evidently was her own drawing-room. The fittings of the room were distinguishable, and the girl was seated with her back to a large grand piano, leaning an elbow upon the keyboard.

We took the photograph from its frame; there was nothing written upon it. Then we rummaged through the papers on the desk and came across a note written in a woman's small script. It gave an address in the East Sixties just off Fifth Avenue—one of the most fashionable sections of the city. It read simply:

They wish it to be otherwise so—good-by.

ELAINE.

The note bore a date some three months previous to the time at which we read it.

We located the name of the family living in the palatial private residence at this address. It was the name of one of this country's most prominent financiers—you would remember it now if I were to mention it here. And I remembered then having read in the society columns of this daughter, Elaine.

That night Mrs. Beacon brought in our dinner and we ate it by the bedside. When we had finished it was nearly eight o'clock. We ordered Norton Hoorne's car, and, locking the piano, and cautioning the housekeeper to admit no one to the studio in our absence, we drove to the address where lived this girl whose connection with the case appeared so definite, and yet, to us, so unfathomable.

## II.

AFTER we had waited perhaps five minutes a young man entered the room, holding in his hand the card Dr. Johns had sent up. He was a few years younger than I—a clean cut, athletic-looking chap—a typical rich man's son of the better sort.

"Won't you sit down, gentlemen?" He waved us back to the chairs from which we had risen, speaking, I thought, in an unnaturally low tone. "I am Mr. Henten—my father is not at home."

"Dr. Manning and myself," Dr. Johns began, when we were seated, glancing at me an instant by way of introduction. "Mr. Henten, we came here this evening to see your father on rather a curious matter. I am sure you will do quite as well."

Our young host inclined his head in agreement and waited.

"I—er—must ask, Mr. Henten, that you will keep all we say strictly confidential?"

The young man nodded gravely.

"Then I will be quite frank with you. I should like to ask first—do you know Norton Hoorne?"

"I have heard of him," said the young man. "I have been to his concerts—he is a very great artist." I thought he spoke a little cautiously, and with a note of coldness in his voice.

"You do not know him personally?"

"I believe—yes, I have met him—some months ago."

Young Mr. Henten seemed to make this admission with reluctance. Then, a little impatiently but without dropping his politely formal manner, he went on—

"But will you tell me what Norton Hoorne—"

"Mr. Henten," Dr. Johns interrupted, "I shall be still more frank with you. We are Norton Hoorne's physicians—and his friends also. Mr. Hoorne is very ill at this moment—very dangerously ill, I might say. This afternoon in his delirium he spoke the name of—er—Miss Henten. There is a photograph of her standing on his desk. From the words he spoke—incoherent—"

The look on the young man's face made Dr. Johns stop abruptly. After an instant he continued, speaking much more firmly than before.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Henten. You must understand we have not the wish—the indelicacy—to pry into Miss Henten's affairs. What we three say here is said in the strictest confidence. We are Mr. Hoorne's physicians. His life is in danger. The information we seek is for his good only. I trust you will understand that and will do what you can to help us."

"What information is it you desire?" asked the young man.

Dr. Johns leaned forward earnestly. "Miss Henten and Norton Hoorne were friends?"

"They were, but the friendship was broken off several months ago."

"Why?"

Young Mr. Henten hesitated. "Elaine was to have married Sir Oliver Baconfield. It was announced recently," he said finally.

"Was to—?"

"My sister died this morning," said the young man quietly.

The effect of this announcement on Dr. Johns and me must have surprised our host greatly.

"Oh, I am very sorry, Mr. Henten," Dr. Johns hastened to say contritely when he had recovered himself somewhat. "I can understand now your reluctance—our coming at such a time—"

The young man bit his lip and looked away; we could see he was struggling to suppress his emotion.

"We will not keep you more than a moment longer," Dr. Johns added. "There are a few questions—I beg you will not think them irrelevant. They have, I assure you, a direct bearing upon Norton Hoorne's present welfare. If you will let me hurt you just a moment more, Mr. Henten. It may be—I think it is—a matter of life or death to our patient."

The young man bowed his head. "What is it you want to know?" he asked in a low voice.

"I will be as brief as possible. Was your sister ever engaged to Norton Hoorne?"

"No—not that I know of."

"They were very good friends?"

"I think so—yes."

"Why was the friendship broken off?"

The young man met Dr. Johns's gaze with a look of almost pleading appeal.  
"Why was the friendship broken off?" persisted the doctor. "Did they quarrel?"

"No." The youth spoke so low we could hardly hear him.

"Were they—were they in love?"

Young Mr. Henten's increasing agitation became manifest.

"I'm sorry to hurt you, my lad," Dr. Johns added gently. "But I must know these things. Were they in love?"

"Yes, they were."

"And it was broken off so that she could become engaged to some one else?"

"My—my mother wished her to marry Lord Baconfield. My father forbade her seeing Norton Hoorne again."

Dr. Johns sat back in his chair. "What was the cause of your sister's death, Mr. Henten?" He tried to ask the question quietly, but I knew by my own emotion the anxiety with which he awaited its answer.

Young Mr. Henten raised his head wearily. "She died of pneumonia," he said. "She caught a severe cold. It was very sudden—though she had not been well for some time."

Dr. Johns thought a moment and then resumed.

"After her friendship with Norton Hoorne was broken off, was she—did she seem ill?"

"She never seemed quite herself. She—she— Oh, Dr. Johns, if you please, I—" The young man seemed at the point of breaking down.

"I'm sorry," Dr. Johns said kindly. "If you will just bear with me a moment more—then we will go. Your sister was musical?"

"She would have been a very fine pianist. She was a pupil of Norton Hoorne."

"Afterward—I mean these last few months—did she play frequently?"

"Not as much as before. Only at night sometimes, in the evening, she would go into the music-room alone and play."

"What sort of music would she play?"

"I don't know. It *was* peculiar. Improvisations of her own sometimes, I think. We did not like her to play—it was not good for her."

"Why not?" Dr. Johns's eyes never left the young man's face.

"It made her ill. Once or twice she—she fainted. We found her lying there—once on the floor where she had fallen."

Dr. Johns rose abruptly, and crossing to where the young man sat low down in his chair, laid an arm over his shoulder.

"We will go now, my lad," he said gently. "I am sorry to have hurt you, but it was necessary. I know you do not understand why I have asked these questions. You need never understand—now. And remember—our visit here to-night and what we have said, you have given your promise—you will tell no one?"

"No, sir, I will not mention it, if you wish me not to."

"Thank you." The doctor straightened up. "Your sister was a very fine little woman. You know that—and we know it. Good night, my lad."

"Good night, sir," said the young man, rising.

During the drive back to Norton Hoorne's studio, Dr. Johns showed a peculiar reticence in discussing the interview we had just had. The few questions and comments I volunteered he answered so shortly and with such abstraction of manner that I soon gave up and remained silent.

Back at the house on Riverside Drive, we went immediately to Hoorne's studio. We found nothing unusual had occurred during our absence. Norton Hoorne's body still lay motionless on the cot.

After we had dismissed the housekeeper with such assurances of her master's recovery as we could give, and were again alone, Dr. Johns locked both doors of the room, and turning to face me, began abruptly:

"Will, whatever you or I may think about this case, it is obvious that theoretical discussion of it is futile. I am convinced of but one thing—the secret lies with Norton; we must make him tell us."

"Do we dare?" I asked; I dreaded further musical experiments.

"We must—there is no other way. And to do nothing—" Dr. Johns broke off and shuddered.

"Shall I play now?" I asked. My companion nodded and seated himself beside the cot.

I began to play, softly at first, then louder. For what seemed ages there was no response. Again I heard the sound of that weird voice, babbling incoherently, with low moans, and once interrupted by a piercing shriek.

I ceased playing and heard Dr. Johns say:

"You must speak more clearly, Norton. Now—try—what is it you want to tell us?"

In the silence that followed I played slowly a series of soft modulations. Then I waited, and after a time, from the lips of Norton Hoorne came the words:

*"In the desk—another drawer—the letter—for you. Use it, for God's sake, use it."*

We found it after a long search, in a secret drawer of the desk. It was a large envelope, sealed, and inscribed with both our names. It contained a folded sheet of music manuscript and a letter. The letter, which was in Hoorne's handwriting, we opened first. It contained only two lines:

I fear this thing. I cannot tell to what it will lead. I know I can trust you both, if need arises, to use the enclosed.

That was all.

The music was written in Hoorne's careless, hurried way, with which I was quite familiar. It was a composition of perhaps sixty bars. And at the top, for its title, was the one word:

#### \*RELEASE\*

For a moment we stared at this cryptic paper in silence. Then our glances met, and in Dr. Johns's eyes I read the same doubt of its meaning that he must have seen in mine.

"Can you play it?" he asked; his voice almost broke with the intensity of his emotion.

"Yes," I answered. "Shall I?"

He flung his hands to his head with a gesture of despair.

"Play it," he said hopelessly.

The scene in Norton Hoorne's studio that night, as I remember it, was fantastic and gruesome in the extreme. The room was in semidarkness. The shades were down, and we had drawn the heavy portières together before the French windows. The corners of the room and its heavily beamed ceiling were shrouded in thick, black shadows. The piano stood quite in shadow, with only a dim glow of amber light from a lamp shining upon its rack and keyboard.

Near by stood the white-linened bed with the ghastly white face of Norton Hoorne upon its snowy pillow. And from a stand at the bedside a beam of light fell full upon the expressionless features.

At first I was trembling so violently I would not dared have made the attempt to play. Forcing myself to calmness, I ran my fingers silently over the keys, staring intently at what I knew instinctively was Hoorne's unplayed composition, finding its extraordinary harmonies, and fixing the rhythm in my mind.

After many minutes of guiding my cold, trembling fingers in their unfamiliar way over the keys, I began to play. In the hush of the room the fantastic music welled out with a throbbing intensity. No longer was I nervous, no longer afraid. The shadows of the studio faded into blackness—a great void of nothingness all about me—as I abandoned myself more and more to the influence of the strange harmonies I was creating. Now my innermost being felt their power, for they awakened emotions my soul had never known before.

The blackness around grew denser. My senses seemed freed of every earthly tie. The room, the piano, everything, was blotted out. Only the music remained, quivering out through the void, crying with the sorrow of the ages, but always tender, inexpressibly tender, and luring—luring me on—and on—

I shall never forget the shock to my senses when the first sharp cry from Dr. Johns brought me to myself. The music died—throbbing away into silence. I found myself sitting at the keyboard, cold and shivering in the hot, close air of the room.

"Look! Look there!" I heard Dr. Johns's low whisper as though from a great distance.

The corner of the room and the ceiling beyond and above Hoorne's white, expressionless face was shrouded with a great, black, grotesque shadow. I do not know what made me stare in that direction, but as I stared the shadow began to take form. At first it seemed merely to waver; then it began to contract, slowly at first, then more rapidly.

Then it seemed no longer black but vaguely luminous, like a silver fog gleaming in the dim light of a hidden moon. And then all at once I realized that it was taking shape. I could see plainly the tiny glowing particles that composed it, twisting and crawling upon themselves. But the shape remained,

grew more definite, until at last I recognized it for what it was—the figure of a young girl—the girl of the photograph—the girl whose brother we had just left.

I do not know how long it took me to come to this realization of what I was seeing. Probably it was only an instant; it seemed an eternity.

I could hear Dr. Johns's labored breathing—see dimly the outlines of the cot and Hoorne's face upon its pillow. But all that remained clear and real was the figure of this girl, quivering there in the air above the bed.

The upper part of her body particularly was vivid; below the breasts it seemed to melt away into the blackness of the room beyond. Her hair hung in two flowing braids over her bare shoulders; her arms were reaching down toward the bed, and on her beautiful face was a look of tenderness and sorrow and unutterable longing.

And then I saw that around her head and shoulders there hung another radiance, dimmer far than the outlines of her form—a radiance that seemed to fade away as I looked at it directly. Yet I knew it was there; and I seemed to feel, too, rather than see, that it was not silver, but the delicate color of a rose—a color extraordinarily beautiful, yet fragile, wistful as the rose petals it resembled.

Then as I sat staring I heard a whisper come up from the bed. The whisper grew louder, and I heard that same toneless voice from the lips of Norton Hoorne, saying:

*"I cannot stay here. I must go. Play—play—you must play."*

I think I must have resumed playing; I know I heard music—the same music as before, only softer, sweeter, more tender.

And then, from the body lying inert on the bed, I saw issue another shape—in outline, form, and every detail the body of Norton Hoorne. It glowed, swirled, and drifted upward. It was Norton Hoorne—its face the face of my friend as I had always known him. After an instant his figure hung swaying above the bed. And from it depended a thin silver cord—fine as the finest gossamer, holding it chained to its human shell below.

The music swelled louder. The arms of the girl reached out; her eyes seemed to cry aloud with yearning. The man's figure pulled and strained at its leash, but the silver cord held strong.

The music grew still louder, thundering now in the hush of the room. The body in the bed sat up suddenly, beating with clenched hands its naked breast. And then, slowly it seemed, the silver cord parted.

A look of ineffable happiness suffused the girl's face as the man's figure, growing suddenly brighter, swirled upward and mingled with hers.

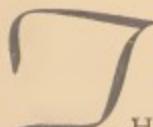
The body on the bed fell back upon the pillow and lay motionless. The mingled shapes above drifted away. The music ceased abruptly.

Norton Hoorne was—dead?

# The Power and the Glory

by Charles W. Diffin

*The moral implications of atomic power are haunting the capitals of the world. Underlying all debates, all actions of nations, is the haunting question—what will become of us all if this atomic power gets out of hand? A force for good it could be. A force for evil it has already been. And as the atomic bomb progresses to ever higher stages, the clock of history ticks louder for all humanity. The problem was not unforeseen. Here is a short story, written and published in 1930, which outlined the whole dreadful impasse fifteen years before it materialized. Charles W. Diffin may have understated the difficulty of releasing atomic energy—but he has certainly not understated the ethical problems that now face men of science the world over.*



HERE WERE papers on the desk, a litter of papers scrawled over, in the careless writing of indifferent students, with the symbols of chemistry and long mathematical computations. The man at the desk pushed them aside to rest his lean, lined face on one thin hand. The other arm, ending at the wrist, was on the desk before him.

Students of a great university had long since ceased to speculate about the missing hand. The result of an experiment, they knew—a hand that was a mass of lifeless cells, amputated quickly that the living arm might be saved—but that was some several years ago, ancient history to those who came and went through Professor Eddinger's classroom.

And now Professor Eddinger was weary—weary and old, he told himself—as he closed his eyes to shut out the sight of the interminable papers and the stubby wrist that had ended forever his experiments and the delicate manipulations which only he could do.

He reached slowly for a buzzing phone, but his eyes brightened at the voice that came to him.

"I've got it—I've got it!" The words were almost incoherent. "This is Avery, Professor—Avery! You must come at once. You will share in it; I owe it all to you . . . you will be the first to see . . . I am sending a taxi for you—"

Professor Eddinger's tired eyes crinkled to a smile. Enthusiasm like this was rare among his youngsters. But Avery—with the face of a poet, a

dreamer's eyes and the mind of a scientist—good boy, Avery!—a long time since he had seen him—had him in his own laboratory for two years. . . .

"What's this all about?" he asked.

"No—no!" said a voice; "I can't tell you—it is too big—greater than the induction motor—greater than the electric light—it is the greatest thing in the world. The taxi should be there now—you must come—"

A knock at the office door where a voice said, "Car for Professor Eddinger," confirmed the excited words.

"I'll come," said the Professor, "right away."

He pondered, as the car whirled him across the city, on what this greatest thing in the world might be. And he hoped with gentle skepticism that the enthusiasm was warranted. A young man opened the car door as they stopped. His face was flushed, Eddinger noted, hair pushed back in disarray, his shirt torn open at the throat.

"Wait here," he told the driver and took the Professor by the arm to hurry him into a dilapidated building.

"Not much of a laboratory," he said, "but we'll have better, you and I; we'll have better—"

The room seemed bare with its meager equipment, but it was neat, as became the best student of Professor Eddinger. Rows of reagent bottles stood on the shelves, but the tables were a litter of misplaced instruments and broken glassware where trembling hands had fumbled in heedless excitement.

"Glad to see you again, Avery." The gentle voice of Professor Eddinger had lost its tired tone. "It's been two years you've been working, I judge. Now what is this great discovery, boy? What have you found?"

The younger man, in whose face the color came and went, and whose eyes were shining from dark hollows that marked long days and sleepless nights, still clung to the other's arm.

"It's real," he said; "it's great! It means fortune and fame, and you're in on that, Professor. The old master," he said and clapped a hand affectionately upon a thin shoulder; "I owe it all to you. And now I have—I have learned. . . . No, you shall see for yourself. Wait—"

He crossed quickly to a table. On it was an apparatus; the eyes of the older man widened as he saw it. It was intricate—a maze of tubing. There was a glass bulb above—the generator of a cathode ray, obviously—and electro-magnets below and on each side. Beneath was a crude sphere of heavy lead—a retort, it might be—and from this there passed two massive, insulated cables. The understanding eyes of the Professor followed them, one to a terminal on a great insulating block upon the floor, the other to a similarly protected terminal of carbon some feet above it in the air.

The trembling fingers of the young man made some few adjustments, then he left the instrument to take his place by an electric switch. "Stand back," he warned, and closed the switch.

There was a gentle hissing from within glass tubes, the faint glow of a blue-green light. And that was all, until—with a crash like the ripping

crackle of lightning, a white flame arced between the terminals of the heavy cables. It hissed ceaselessly through the air where now the tang of ozone was apparent. The carbon blocks glowed with a brilliant incandescence when the flame ceased with the motion of a hand where Avery pulled a switch.

The man's voice was quiet now. "You do not know yet, what you have seen, but there was a tremendous potential there—an amperage I can't measure with my limited facilities." He waved a deprecating hand about the ill-furnished laboratory. "But you have seen—" His voice trembled and failed at the forming of the words.

"—The disintegration of the atom," said Professor Eddinger quietly, "and the release of power unlimited. Did you use thorium?" he inquired.

The other looked at him in amazement. Then: "I should have known you would understand," he said humbly. "And you know what it means"—again his voice rose—"power without end to do the work of the world—great vessels driven a lifetime on a mere ounce of matter—a revolution in transportation—in living . . ." He paused. "The liberation of mankind," he added, and his voice was reverent. "This will do the work of the world; it will make a new heaven and a new earth! Oh, I have dreamed dreams," he exclaimed, "I have seen visions. And it has been given to me—me!—to liberate man from the curse of Adam . . . the sweat of his brow. . . . I can't realize it even yet. I—I am not worthy. . . ."

He raised his eyes slowly in the silence to gaze in wondering astonishment at the older man. There was no answering light, no exaltation on the lined face. Only sadness in the tired eyes that looked at him and through him as if focused upon something in a dim future—or past.

"Don't you see?" asked the wondering man. "The freedom of men—the liberation of a race. No more poverty, no endless, grinding labor." His young eyes, too, were looking into the future, a future of blinding light. "Culture," he said, "instead of heart-breaking toil, a chance to grow mentally, spiritually; it is another world, a new life—" And again he asked: "Surely, you see?"

"I see," said the other; "I see—plainly."

"The new world," said Avery. "It—it dazzles me; it rings like music in my ears."

"I see no new world," was the slow response.

The young face was plainly perplexed. "Don't you believe?" he stammered. "After you have seen . . . I thought *you* would have the vision, would help me emancipate the world, save it—" His voice failed.

"Men have a way of crucifying their saviors," said the tired voice.

The inventor was suddenly indignant. "You are blind," he said harshly; "it is too big for you. And I would have had you stand beside me in the great work. . . . I shall announce it alone. . . . There will be laboratories—enormous!—and factories. My invention will be perfected, simplified, compressed. A generator will be made—thousands of horsepower to do the work of a city, free thousands of men—made so small you can hold it in one hand."

The sensitive face was proudly alight, proud and a trifle arrogant. The exaltation of his coming power was strong upon him.

"Yes," said Professor Eddinger, "in one hand." And he raised his right arm that he might see where the end of a sleeve was empty.

"I am sorry," said the inventor abruptly; "I didn't mean . . . but you will excuse me now; there is so much to be done—" But the thin figure of Professor Eddinger had crossed to the far table to examine the apparatus there.

"Crude," he said beneath his breath, "crude—but efficient!"

In the silence a rat had appeared in the distant corner. The Professor nodded as he saw it. The animal stopped as the man's eyes came upon it; then sat squirrel-like on one of the shelves as it ate a crumb of food. Some morsel from a hurried lunch of Avery's, the Professor reflected—poor Avery! Yes, there was much to be done.

He spoke as much to himself as to the man who was now beside him. "It enters here," he said and peered downward toward the lead bulb. He placed a finger on the side of the metal. "About here, I should think. . . . Have you a drill? And a bit of quartz?"

The inventor's eyes were puzzled, but the assurance of his old instructor claimed obedience. He produced a small drill and a fragment like broken glass. And he started visibly as the one hand worked awkwardly to make a small hole in the side of the lead. But he withdrew his own restraining hand, and he watched in mystified silence while the quartz was fitted to make a tiny window and a thin figure stooped to sight as if aiming the opening toward a far corner where a brown rat sat upright in earnest munching of a dry crust.

The Professor drew Avery with him as he retreated noiselessly from the instrument. "Will you close the switch," he whispered.

The young man hesitated, bewildered, at this unexpected demonstration, and the Professor himself reached with his one hand for the black lever. Again the arc crashed into life, to hold for a brief instant until Professor Eddinger opened the switch.

"Well," demanded Avery, "what's all the show? Do you think you are teaching me anything—about my own instrument?" There was hurt pride and jealous resentment in his voice.

"See," said Professor Eddinger quietly. And his one thin hand pointed to a far shelf, where, in the shadow, was a huddle of brown fur and a bit of crust. It fell as they watched, and the "plop" of the soft body upon the floor sounded loud in the silent room.

"The law of compensation," said Professor Eddinger. "Two sides to the medal! Darkness and light—good and evil—life . . . and death!"

The young man was stammering. "What do you mean?—a death ray evolved?" And: "What of it?" he demanded; "what of it? What's that got to do with it?"

"A death ray," the other agreed. "You have dreamed, Avery—one must in order to create—but it is only a dream. You dreamed of life—a fuller

life—for the world, but you would have given them, as you have just seen, death."

The face of Avery was white as wax; his eyes glared savagely from dark hollows.

"A rat!" he protested. "You have killed a rat . . . and you say—you say—" He raised one trembling hand to his lips to hold them from forming the unspeakable words.

"A rat," said the Professor—"or a man . . . or a million men."

"We will control it."

"All men will have it—the best and the worst . . . and there is no defence."

"It will free the world—"

"It will destroy it."

"No!"—and the white-faced man was shouting now—"you don't understand—you can't see—"

The lean figure of the scientist straightened to its full height. His eyes met those of the younger man, silent now before him, but Avery knew the eyes never saw him; they were looking far off, following the wings of thought. In the stillness the man's words came harsh and commanding—

"Do you see the cities," he said, "crumbling to ruins under the cold stars? The fields? They are rank with wild growth, torn and gullied by the waters; a desolate land where animals prowl. And the people—the people!—wandering bands, lower, as the years drag on, than the beasts themselves; the children dying, forgotten, in the forgotten lands; a people to whom the progress of our civilization is one with the ages past, for whom there is again the slow, toiling road toward the light.

"And somewhere, perhaps, a conquering race, the most brutal and callous of mankind, rioting in their sense of power and dragging themselves down to oblivion . . ."

His gaze came slowly back to the room and the figure of the man still fighting for his dream.

"They would not," said Avery hoarsely; "they'd use it for good."

"Would they?" asked Professor Eddinger. He spoke simply as one stating simple facts. "I love my fellow men," he said, "and I killed them in thousands in the last war—I, and my science, and my poison gas."

The figure of Avery slumped suddenly upon a chair; his face was buried in his hands. "And I would have been," he groaned, "the greatest man in the world."

"You shall be greater," said the Professor, "though only we shall know it—you and I . . . You will save the world—from itself."

The figure, bowed and sunken in the chair, made no move; the man was heedless of the kindly hand upon his shoulder. His voice, when he spoke, was that of one afar off, speaking out of a great loneliness. "You don't understand," he said dully; "you can't—"

But Professor Eddinger, a cog in the wheels of a great educational machine, glanced at the watch on his wrist. Again his thin shoulders were stooped, his voice tired. "My classes," he said. "I must be going. . . ."

In the gathering dusk Professor Eddinger locked carefully the door of his office. He crossed beyond his desk and fumbled with his one hand for his keys.

There was a cabinet to be opened, and he stared long in the dim light at the object he withdrew. He looked approvingly at the exquisite workmanship of an instrument where a generator of the cathode ray and an intricate maze of tubing surmounted electro-magnets and a round lead bulb. There were terminals for attaching heavy cables; it was a beautiful thing . . . His useless arm moved to bring an imaginary hand before the window of quartz in the lead sphere.

"Power," he whispered and repeated Avery's words; "power to build a city—or destroy a civilization . . . and I hold it in one hand."

He replaced the apparatus in the safety of its case. "The saviors of mankind!" he said, and his tone was harsh and bitter.

But a smile, whimsical, kindly, crinkled his tired eyes as he turned to his desk and its usual litter of examination papers.

"It is something, Avery," he whispered to that distant man, "to belong in so distinguished a group."

# *He Walked by Day*

by Julius Long

Julius Long, who is a lawyer by profession, is better known as a detective writer than as a fantasy author. (His terrifically exciting thriller, "Murder in Her Big Blue Eyes" was recently published by Avon.) About a dozen or so good weird stories were written and sold by Mr. Long quite early in his avocational writing career—for like so many, fantasy is a labor of love, other writing, a labor for profit. "He Walked By Day" is an unusual sort of ghost story—the story of one of the most constructive ghosts ever—a story that is somewhat reminiscent of the style of Ray Bradbury.



RIEDENBURG, OHIO, sleeps between the muddy waters of the Miami River and the rusty track of a little-used spur of the Big Four. It suddenly became important to us because of its strategic position. It bisected a road which we were to surface with tar. The materials were to come by way of the spur and to be unloaded at the tiny yard.

We began work on a Monday morning. I was watching the tar distributor while it pumped tar from the car, when I felt a tap upon my back. I turned about, and when I beheld the individual who had tapped me, I actually jumped.

I have never, before or since, encountered such a singular figure. He was at least seven feet tall, and he seemed even taller than that because of the uncommon slenderness of his frame. He looked as if he had never been warned by the rays of the sun, but confined all his life in a dank and dismal cellar. I concluded that he had been the prey of some insidious, etiolating disease. Certainly, I thought, nothing else could account for his ashen complexion. It seemed that not blood, but shadows passed through his veins.

"Do you want to see me?" I asked.

"Are you the road feller?"

"Yes."

"I want a job. My mother's sick. I have her to keep. Won't you please give me a job?"

We really didn't need another man, but I was interested in this pallid giant with his staring, gray eyes. I called to Juggy, my foreman.

"Do you think we can find a place for this fellow?" I asked.

Juggy stared incredulously. "He looks like he'd break in two."

"I'm stronger'n anyone," said the youth.

He looked about, and his eyes fell on the Mack, which had just been loaded

with six tons of gravel. He walked over to it, reached down and seized the hub of a front wheel. To our utter amazement, the wheel was slowly lifted from the ground. When it was raised to a height of eight or nine inches, the youth looked inquiringly in our direction. We must have appeared sufficiently awed, for he dropped the wheel with an abruptness that evoked a yell from the driver, who thought his tire would blow out.

"We can certainly use this fellow," I said, and Juggy agreed.

"What's your name, Shadow?" he demanded.

"Karl Rand," said the boy, but "Shadow" stuck to him, as far as the crew was concerned.

We put him to work at once, and he slaved all morning, accomplishing tasks that we ordinarily assigned two or three men to do.

We were on the road at lunchtime, some miles from Friedenburg. I recalled that Shadow had not brought his lunch.

"You can take mine," I said. "I'll drive in to the village and eat."

"I never eat none," was Shadow's astonishing remark.

"You never eat!" The crew had heard his assertion, and there was an amused crowd about him at once. I fancied that he was pleased to have an audience.

"No, I never eat," he repeated. "You see"—he lowered his voice—"you see, I'm a ghost!"

We exchanged glances. So Shadow was psychopathic. We shrugged our shoulders.

"Whose ghost are you?" gibe Juggy. "Napoleon's?"

"Oh, no. I'm my own ghost. You see, I'm dead."

"Ah!" This was all Juggy could say. For once, the arch-kidder was nonplussed.

"That's why I'm so strong," added Shadow.

"How long have you been dead?" I asked.

"Six years. I was fifteen years old then."

"Tell us how it happened. Did you die a natural death, or were you killed trying to lift a fast freight off the track?" This question was asked by Juggy, who was slowly recovering.

"It was in the cave," answered Shadow solemnly. "I slipped and fell over a bank. I cracked my head on the floor. I've been a ghost ever since."

"Then why do you walk by day instead of by night?"

"I got to keep my mother."

Shadow looked so sincere, so pathetic when he made this answer, that we left off teasing him. I tried to make him eat my lunch, but he would have none of it. I expected to see him collapse that afternoon, but he worked steadily and showed no sign of tiring. We didn't know what to make of him. I confess that I was a little afraid in his presence. After all, a madman with almost superhuman strength is a dangerous character. But Shadow seemed perfectly harmless and docile.

When we had returned to our boarding-house that night, we plied our landlord with questions about Karl Rand. He drew himself up authoritatively, and lectured for some minutes upon Shadow's idiosyncrasies.

"The boy first started telling that story about six years ago," he said. "He never was right in his head, and nobody paid much attention to him at first. He said he'd fallen and busted his head in a cave, but everybody knows they ain't no caves hereabouts. I don't know what put that idea in his head. But Karl's stuck to it ever since, and I 'spect they's lots of folks round Friedenburg that's growed to believe him—more'n admits they do."

That evening, I patronized the village barber shop, and was careful to introduce Karl's name into the conversation. "All I can say is," said the barber solemnly, "that his hair ain't growed any in the last six years, and they was nary a whisker on his chin. No, sir, nary a whisker on his chin."

This did not strike me as so tremendously odd, for I had previously heard of cases of such arrested growth. However, I went to sleep that night thinking about Shadow.

The next morning, the strange youth appeared on time and rode with the crew to the job.

"Did you eat well?" Juggy asked him.

Shadow shook his head. "I never eat none."

The crew half believed him.

Early in the morning, Steve Bradshaw, the nozzle man on the tar distributor, burned his hand badly. I hurried him in to see the village doctor. When he had dressed Steve's hand, I took advantage of my opportunity and made inquiries about Shadow.

"Karl's got me stumped," said the country practitioner. "I confess I can't understand it. Of course, he won't let me get close enough to him to look at him, but it don't take an examination to tell there's something abnormal about him."

"I wonder what could have given him the idea that he's his own ghost," I said.

"I'm not sure, but I think what put it in his head was the things people used to say to him when he was a kid. He always looked like a ghost, and everybody kidded him about it. I kind of think that's what gave him the notion."

"Has he changed at all in the last six years?"

"Not a bit. He was as tall six years ago as he is today. I think that his abnormal growth might have had something to do with the stunting of his mind. But I don't know for sure."

I had to take Steve's place on the tar distributor during the next four days, and I watched Shadow pretty closely. He never ate any lunch, but he would sit with us while we devoured ours. Juggy could not resist the temptation to joke at his expense.

"There was a ghost back in my home town," Juggy once told him. "Mary Jenkens was an awful pretty woman when she was living, and when she was a girl, every fellow in town wanted to marry her. Jim Jenkens finally led her down the aisle, and we was all jealous—especially Joe Garver. He was broke up awful. Mary hadn't no more'n come back from the Falls when Joe was trying to make up to her. She wouldn't have nothing to do with him. Joe was hurt bad."

"A year after she was married, Mary took sick and died. Jim Jenkens was awful put out about it. He didn't act right from then on. He got to imagining things. He got suspicious of Joe.

"What you got to worry about?" people would ask him. "Mary's dead. There can't no harm come to her now."

"But Jim didn't feel that way. Joe heard about it, and he got to teasing Jim.

"I was out with Mary's ghost last night," he would say. And Jim got to believing him. One night, he lays low for Joe and shoots him with both barrels. 'He was goin' to meet my wife!' Jim told the judge."

"Did they give him the chair?" I asked.

"No, they gave him life in the state hospital."

Shadow remained impervious to Juggy's yarns, which were told for his special benefit. During this time, I noticed something decidedly strange about the boy, but I kept my own counsel. After all, a contractor can not keep the respect of his men if he appears too credulous.

One day Juggy voiced my suspicions for me. "You know," he said, "I never saw that kid sweat. It's uncanny. It's ninety in the shade today, and Shadow ain't got a drop of perspiration on his face. Look at his shirt. Dry as if he'd just put it on."

Everyone in the crew noticed this. I think we all became uneasy in Shadow's presence.

One morning he didn't show up for work. We waited a few minutes and left without him. When the trucks came in with their second load of gravel, the drivers told us that Shadow's mother had died during the night. This news cast a gloom over the crew. We all sympathized with the youth.

"I wish I hadn't kidded him," said Juggy.

We all put in an appearance that evening at Shadow's little cottage, and I think he was tremendously gratified. "I won't be working no more," he told me. "There ain't no need for me now."

I couldn't afford to lay off the crew for the funeral, but I did go myself. I even accompanied Shadow to the cemetery.

We watched while the grave was being filled. There were many others there, for one of the chief delights in a rural community is to see how the mourners "take on" at a funeral. Moreover, their interest in Karl Rand was deeper. He had said he was going back to his cave, that he would never again walk by day. The villagers, as well as myself, wanted to see what would happen.

When the grave was filled, Shadow turned to me, eyed me pathetically a moment, then walked from the grave. Silently, we watched him set out across the field. Two mischievous boys disobeyed the entreaties of their parents, and set out after him.

They returned to the village an hour later with a strange and incredible story. They had seen Karl disappear into the ground. The earth had literally swallowed him up. The youngsters were terribly frightened. It was thought that Karl had done something to scare them, and their imaginations had got the better of them.

But the next day they were asked to lead a group of the more curious to the spot where Karl had vanished. He had not returned, and they were worried.

In a ravine two miles from the village, the party discovered a small but penetrable entrance to a cave. Its existence had never been dreamed of by the farmer who owned the land. (He has since then opened it up for tourists, and it is known as Ghost Cave.)

Someone in the party had thoughtfully brought an electric searchlight, and the party squeezed its way into the cave. Exploration revealed a labyrinth of caverns of exquisite beauty. But the explorers were oblivious to the esthetics of the cave; they thought only of Karl and his weird story.

After circuitous ramblings, they came to a sudden drop in the floor. At the base of this precipice they beheld a skeleton.

The coroner and the sheriff were duly summoned. The sheriff invited me to accompany him.

I regret that I cannot describe the gruesome, awesome feeling that came over me as I made my way through those caverns. Within their chambers the human voice is given a peculiar, sepulchral sound. But perhaps it was the knowledge of Karl's bizarre story, his unaccountable disappearance that inspired me with such awe, such thoughts.

The skeleton gave me a shock, for it was a skeleton of a man *seven feet tall!* There was no mistake about this; the coroner was positive.

The skull had been fractured, apparently by a fall over the bank. It was I who discovered the hat near by. It was rotted with decay, but in the leather band were plainly discernible the crudely penned initials, "K.R."

I felt suddenly weak. The sheriff noticed my nervousness. "What's the matter, have you seen a ghost?"

I laughed nervously and affected nonchalance. With the best off-hand manner I could command, I told him of Karl Rand. He was not impressed.

"You don't—?" He did not wish to insult my intelligence by finishing his question.

At this moment, the coroner looked up and commented: "This skeleton has been here about six years, I'd say."

I was not courageous enough to acknowledge my suspicions, but the villagers were outspoken. The skeleton, they declared, was that of Karl Rand. The coroner and the sheriff were incredulous, but, politicians both, they displayed some sympathy with this view.

My friend, the sheriff, discussed the matter privately with me some days later. His theory was that Karl had discovered the cave, wandered inside and come upon the corpse of some unfortunate who had preceded him. He had been so excited by his discovery that his hat had fallen down beside the body. Later, aided by the remarks of the villagers about his ghostliness, he had fashioned his own legend.

This, of course, may be true. But the people of Friedenburg are not convinced by this explanation, and neither am I. For the identity of the skeleton has never been determined, and Karl Rand has never since been seen to walk by day.

# *Original Sin*

by S. Fowler Wright

Connoisseurs of the science-fiction novel have rejoiced to see S. Fowler Wright's "The World Below" returned to print in a new book edition (Shasta Publishers, Chicago). For that novel of a million years to come is possibly one of the finest and most unforgettable portraits of a really remote future that has ever been produced . . . ranking with Olaf Stapledon's epics. S. Fowler Wright is a prolific writer, however, and unfortunately for us many of his novels are simply detective stories or adventure with but a passing nod to fantasy. His short story "The Rat" is a classic terror tale which has often been reprinted. And we now have the pleasure of bringing you another fine short story, a perhaps tongue-in-cheek tale of two people in Utopia . . . and of the dreadful crime called love.



AM XP4378882. I write this with a pen, on sheets of paper in the old way, instead of speaking it into a recorder, because I want it to have a chance of survival, even though a time should come when no more of those instruments can be made or preserved; and because it is a very private thing. If this should be seen by one who could read its words, my death would be nearer even than are those of the men and women among whom I move.

I am writing on the 28th day of September, 2838, being nineteen years of age yesterday, and my friend Stella being two minutes younger than I. We two are the youngest people now alive in the world, having been born somewhat after our time, though there may be eight millions of those who are not more than fourteen days older than we.

For when men conquered disease, and the life of a healthy child became a certain thing, there was a law made that no parents should have more than three (though they could have less if they would, and there were always some that were barren; but there was margin enough for that, and for such as died young, being scalded, or burnt, or perhaps choked with a bone); and then it was soon seen that it was a foolish thing for these children to be born whenever their parents would, as in the old disorderly days, and there was a further law that there should be a space of five years during which all married people might have what children they would (being it not more than three), and after that there should be a period of twenty-five years when none should be born at all.

This worked well in more ways than might be thought at the first, for the children bred were all of a like age, and could be taught at one time, and would advance in a level way, whether at task or game, and the training of each year was in no more than three grades, and they were of a like

age to wed when the time came, and would be still in their youth when the law was that they might have children themselves. There was time to plan how the next generation should be reared and taught, and each was divided from each in a clear way.

So it has been now for three hundred years, and each generation has been born into a fairer world. There is no disease. There is no dirt. There is no hunger or thirst. There is no pain. There is enough for all of all things that a man can need, so that there is no cause either to envy or hate, either to strive or long.

Men have learnt to see that they need not die till their strength fail, and then death can be made pleasant enough; but the question of why they live has been left unsolved, and it is one which has been asked in an ever more urgent way.

It is over a century ago that the Doctrine of Futility was first discussed, in records two of which still remain. It was not regarded seriously at first, and was freely allowed. But there came a time when it became a cult which some strongly held, and others disliked with the emphasis which the Law of Moderation forbids.

Consequently, it was banned, and all recordings erased, excepting only those which were preserved in the Great Museum at Timbuctoo.

There was cause for this law, as it had been found that men might hold different opinions with an obstinacy of assertion which would lead to violent quarrels, when wounds might be given, even such as would cause death; and there had been a general determination to remove all occasions of premature decease from the world.

Opinions must not be publicly expressed, except those on which all men were united, or excepting only such a minority as would not dare to dissent aloud, lest they should provoke the Law for the Elimination of Pests, which no one would wish to do.

But these prohibitions were revised every twenty-five years, and it was a remarkable observation that the great majority of controversial questions would become innocuous in such a period, like a wasp that had lost its sting.

This did not happen so quickly to the Doctrine of Futility, but at each successive revision it was regarded by the Guardians of Public Tranquillity with an increased benevolence, until, at the fourth review, there was the necessary unanimous agreement that few would dissent from, and no one would be likely to be seriously disturbed by, the theory which it propounded.

That, briefly stated, was that sentient life on the Earth, and particularly the forecasting and introspective self-consciousness of mankind, is an evolutionary blunder or, at best, a futility, inevitably destined to be corrected by the deliberate action of its own products so soon as they should reach an intellectual maturity sufficient to enable them to recognize both their own abortion, and their power to terminate it.

Sooner or later, it was argued, mankind must reach a maturity of thought which would recognize the vanity of the procession of life and death, and, by its own deliberate and orderly extinction, restore the Harmony of the Uni-

verse, which had been momentarily disturbed by the flicker of sentient life on the planet on which we live.

This theory, being released anew by the Guardians of Public Tranquillity as a harmless, and even obvious proposition, was accepted at first with the passive assent due to that which all men can clearly and equally see. But that mood was quickly succeeded by one of excited interest, as it was realised that it offered a prospect of affirmative action to men whose whole lives had been negative till that hour.

The elimination of every kind of adversity from the experience of human life had left it both emotionally and intellectually barren, without hope and without fear. Its futility had an indisputable quality. Men felt that they had already arrived on the crest of the wave of life—a crest where they scarcely were or did.

But here was something that could be done; something to break the monotony of eventless days. With alacrity, even with enthusiasm, men caught at the idea, discussed, approved, planned: As they did so, their eyes brightened, their listless motions quickened, their voices stirred slightly from their accustomed drawl. Paradoxically, life became faintly valuable again, as the prospect of its destruction engaged their minds.

Should they attempt the extinction of life of every kind? It might be beyond human power. It would certainly be an enterprise of extraordinary difficulty. Actually, all the higher forms of life, apart from mankind, had, for reasons of safety, prudence, or sanitation, been eliminated during several previous centuries. Only its more rudimentary forms remained, and these in severely restricted forms. To sterilise every germ of life in ocean and land and air—no, it could not be done. But such as would remain would be elementary in character: they would be of doubtful consciousness, and surely incapable of the curse of thought. They must be left to blunder to their own ends in their own ways.

But the futility of human life, all its aimless recurrences, could be ended now.

And though, as has been said, as men planned thus, they began paradoxically to feel that they had some purpose in life again, so that, with the thought of its destruction, its value rose, yet they did not therefore weaken in their resolve, for to do so would be to sink back into the sorrowless, joyless atrophy which, as they thus became half-awake, was their greatest dread.

Such has been the talk around us for the last year, while plans for its realization have been developed and approved. It was a doom which even the young accepted with some degree of pleasant excitement rather than sharp demur, for when nothing has happened for nineteen or twenty years of monotonous days—I will not say that I did not accept it myself until the plan was announced in detail, and Stella drew me apart to a secret place, where our whispered voices could not be overheard or recorded in any way, and said, very quietly. "*Don't you see what that means for us?*" And then: "*Don't speak to me again, or give any sign if you mean to do what I hope you will. You'll throw away the last chance if you do. But I had to let you know how I feel, or you might not have guessed you could count on me.*"

It is only a week till it will happen now, and no one has guessed what is in my mind, nor has the plan been altered in any way that would make it vain. I have not looked at Stella, nor, I think, has she looked at me, nor given any sign of what I know she is thinking and hoping now. But she can't be sure, because it must depend upon me. I might leave her alone, and I wonder what she would do then? Or, of course, before that, I might give her away. While I don't, she must see reason to hope . . .

The plan is that the oldest ones will go first, while all comforts remain. There is evident sense in that and, in any case, their time for liquidation would be very near.

After that, the younger ages will go, working progressively downward, and the means of sustaining life will be destroyed in the same progressive manner, so that, when it will come to those of our own age, if we do not destroy ourselves, it will be impossible to live as we do now.

In particular, the means of regulating temperature will be gone, so that we should only be able to resist cold or heat in the old crude ways—by clothes or roofs and walls, or the lighting of fires. And the provision of food would present such difficulties that it is hard to see how they could be overcome. It seems absurd to think that any one should be willing to remain alive under such conditions as that. But, if Stella thinks it may be worth while—after all, we can always die.

It has begun, and the first million, or more, are already dead. The method is that each in turn shall receive an injection from the one next below him on the list, after which he will pass into pleasant dreams. It is a drug that is often used, so that its effects are exactly known. There is an antidote by which men can recover without evil effect, if it be given within two or three hours, but, if they be left without it, their sleep drifts into death.

The injection is best given in the spinal column, so that it can be done better by a man's neighbour than by himself.

Elaborate arrangements for the comfort of all have been made, and the routine is swift, so that it will be no more than three days before my turn and Stella's will come. But we had a fright this morning, and the fact that I found it to be a fright showed me for the first time, with certainty, what I really wish to happen.

We were called, Stella and I, before the Council of Routines. They told us that we were last on the list, which might be an alarming position, we being as young as we were, though it is evident that someone must be there. They said they had discussed changing our places with others of the previous generation, who had volunteered to relieve us.

I thought it best to seem indifferent, and only said that they needn't trouble as far as I was concerned: I couldn't see that it mattered one way or other.

They turned to Stella, and she said: "Oh, don't change it for me! I don't mind being last of all. I rather like the idea."

Anyone would have thought they would have been too lethargic to say any more after that, but the liveliness with which she spoke seemed to rouse

the Second Councillor up. He looked at her, almost alertly, and asked: "You will be last of all. How will you give yourself the injection? Have you thought of that?"

"Oh, yes," she said readily, "we've discussed that. I shall give it to Cerdic, and then, before it has any effect on him, he'll have time to give it to me."

The Councillors didn't look pleased at her use of my familiar name instead of my official number. It showed lack of respect for them, as she should have known. But even they may have seen the humour of making trouble on such a point, when it was not more than thirty hours, or two days at most, before they would extinguish themselves.

Stella said: "I guessed that. Didn't you?"

We had just heard that there had been trouble over the two who had been proposed to take our places at the end of the list. They had been missing when their turn had come—missing, and hard to find. It came out then that it had been their own proposal to the Council of Routines that they should be put last on the list in place of ourselves, and everyone was saying that the Council had shown its wisdom in rejecting their plea.

I was alarmed at first, for I feared that it might lead to some precaution being taken against evasion of the law of extinction by those who would be last on the list, for it was agreed that their purpose had been to attempt to remain alive, and it was said that that would destroy the self-justification of what we did.

For it was obvious that if the human race should perpetrate its own complete self-destruction, it would have demonstrated its own futility in an unanswerable manner, which would be the justification of what it did. But if two should remain alive, and should become the parents of a new race, the whole action would be abortive, and this might be held to be the condemnation of those who did it, rather than of the creation to which they belonged.

This being the prevailing view, it might have been reasonably anticipated that the discovery of unwilling individuals, even two among millions, might have led to some precautionary action which would have been difficult to evade, but I found that opinion was taking another direction, ridiculing the folly of the detected two, and emphasizing how short a time they would have outlived their fellows, and how sharply the pain and misery in which they would have died would have led them to repent their choice.

It was pointed out that it was to avert the possibility of such survivals that all the requirements of human existence were being systematically destroyed, so that, as the final exits were made, it would be impossible for any man or woman to remain alive for more than a few further hours except under conditions of intolerable discomfort, such as, even if they should attempt to endure them, would be promptly fatal.

This is not a view which holds much comfort for us, and though it must be true that our ancestors experienced such conditions in earlier periods, it must be different for us, who have not experienced adverse temperatures or imperfect foods. . . . Well, it is a risk which we must have courage to face, and may have vigour to overcome.

The two who rebelled did not make any great trouble after they were found, and their folly had been fully explained to them. It is said that they took their turns like lambs, as the saying is. (I am not clear as to what a lamb was, but these sayings outlast the meaning, which was doubtless clear to those by whom they were first used.) They are dead by now, and our time is not more than a few hours ahead.

It is done. And we are alone in an empty world. There was an incident at the last which I did not like, but it cannot be altered now.

The time came when there were only six to whom the fatal injection had not been given. And then five—and then four. Rida, who was the last except ourselves, drove the needle into the neck of the one who came before her, and I saw her hand shake as she did it. He lay down in his own place, and it was my turn to deal with her.

I picked up the syringe and refilled it and as I did so I had a feeling of revulsion at what I was expected to do. Why should I not let her live? Why not at least give her the choice—the chance? She looked frightened. She might be glad.

The fact that we were not accepting the law—that we were not intending to kill ourselves—seemed to make it different for me from what it had been for the others. Of course Stella would have no such difficulty. There would be nothing for her to do. But I felt that I should be a murderer if I did not at least ask Rida if she would be willing to live. And she was one whom I liked in some ways better than Stella. Anyone would.

As I filled the syringe Stella was watching me with alert impatient eyes. They met mine and I was sure that she read my thoughts.

Rida had turned her back to me now. I could see her trembling. She said: "I don't like waiting. Be quick."

I lifted the syringe, hesitating. Stella's eyes were on me, bright, hard, insistent.

I said: "I think you ought to know that there's another course you can take if—" I didn't get further than that.

Stella reached over, and grasped my hand. The fatal pressure came from her, not from me. It was done in a second.

She said: "Cerdic had it an inch too low." I don't know whether Rida heard. She went to lie down without looking round. What could anything, after that, matter to her?

I haven't quarrelled with Stella. What use would it be? And when you're alone in the world, and got to be very quick to find means to live—

Should we survive, and found a new race, we ought to make a better world than it was before. But it seemed to me that it was a bad start.

# *The Thing That Walked on the Wind*

by August Derleth

*The very prolific August Derleth, poet, novelist, publisher, and anthologer, was greatly influenced in his formative years by the writings of two famous fantasists, H. P. Lovecraft and Algernon Blackwood. The story of the thing that walked on the wind is evidence of both influences. It is a story inspired by "The Wendigo" and the Cthulhu mythos together—a neat little pastiche.*

S

TATEMENT of John Dalhousie, division chief of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police issued from temporary quarters at Navissa Camp, Manitoba, 10/31/31:

This is my final word regarding the strange circumstances surrounding the disappearance of Constable Robert Norris from Navissa Camp last March 7th, and the discovery of his body on the 17th of this month in a snow bank four miles north of here.

My attitude in the matter will be clearly seen by the time the end of this statement is read. For the assistance of those to whom this matter is not so familiar, I want to chronicle briefly the facts leading up to it. On the 27th of February last, Robert Norris sent me the appended report, which apparently solved the now famed Stillwater mystery, a report which for reasons that will be obvious, could not be released. On the 7th of the following month, Robert Norris vanished without leaving a trace. On the 17th of this October, his body was found deep in a snow bank four miles north of here.

Those are the known facts. I append herewith the last report made to me by Robert Norris:

"Navissa Camp, 27 February, 1931: In view of the extreme difficulty of the task which lies before me in writing to you what I know of the mystery at Stillwater, I take the liberty of copying for you in shortest possible form, the account which appeared in the *Navissa Daily* under date of 27 February, 1930, exactly a year ago at this writing:

"Navissa Camp, February 27: An as yet unverified story regarding the town of Stillwater on the Olassie trail thirty miles above Nelson has come to the editors of the *Daily*.

"It is said that no single inhabitant can be found in the village, and that travelers coming through the district can find no signs of anyone having left

it. The village was last visited on the night of February 25th, just prior to the storm of that date. On that night all was as usual, according to all reports. Since then, nothing has been seen of the inhabitants."

"You will remember this case at once as the unsolved mystery which caused us so much trouble, and which earned us so much undeserved criticism. Something happened here last night which throws a faint light on the Stillwater mystery, affording us some vague clues, but clues of such nature that they can help us not at all, especially so far as staving off press criticism is concerned. But let me tell this from the beginning, just as it happened, and you will be able to see for yourself."

"I had put up with Dr. Jamison, in whose house at the northern end of the village I had been staying for years whenever I stopped over in Navissa Camp. I came to the Camp in early evening, and had hardly got settled when the thing happened.

"I had stepped outside for a moment. It was not cold, nor yet particularly warm. A wind was blowing, yet the sky was clear. As I stood there, the wind seemed to rise, and abruptly it grew strikingly cold. I looked up into the sky, and saw that many of the stars had been blotted out. Then a black spot came hurtling down at me, and I ran back toward the house. Before I could reach it, however, I found my path blocked; before me, the figure of a man fell gently into the snow banks. I stopped, but before I could go to him, another form fell with equal softness on the other side of me. And, lastly, a third form came down; but this form did not come gently—it was thrown to the earth with great force.

"You can imagine my amazement. For a moment, I confess that I did not know just what to do. In that brief space of my hesitation, the sudden wind went down and the sharp cold gave place to the comparative mildness of the early evening. Then I ran to the closest form, and ascertained at once that the man was still living, and was apparently unhurt. The second, also a man, was likewise unhurt. But the third body was that of a woman; she was stone cold—her skin to the touch was icy to an astounding degree—and she had the appearance of having been dead for a long time.

"I called Dr. Jamison, and together we managed to get the three into the house. The two men we put to bed immediately, and for the woman, we called the coroner, the only other doctor in Navissa Camp. We also had to summon other help, and Dr. Jamison called in two nurses. A quick examination proved that the men were, as I conjectured, very little hurt. The same examination disclosed another astonishing point—the identification of these two men.

"You will remember that at about the time of the Stillwater case, on the night of the 25th of February, in fact, two men had left Nelson for Stillwater, and had vanished as mysteriously as the inhabitants of that town. These two men had given their names in Nelson as Allison Wentworth and James Macdonald; identification papers found on the bodies of these strange visitors from above proved conclusively that at least two of the men who were supposed to have been in Stillwater at the time the mysterious tragedy occurred had returned, for our visitors were none other than Wentworth

and Macdonald. You can easily visualize with what anticipation I looked for a solution to the Stillwater mystery from these two men when once they regained consciousness.

"I resolved, in consequence, to keep a bedside watch. The doctors told me that Wentworth showed the best signs of coming out of his unconscious delirium first, and I took my place at his side, one of the nurses ready to take down anything Wentworth might say. Shortly after I had taken my position there, the body of the girl was identified by a resident of Navissa Camp who had already heard of her and had come to look at the body. The girl was Irene Masiitte, the only daughter of the Masiitte who ran the tavern at Stillwater. This indicated conclusively that the two men had been in Stillwater at the time of the inexplicable tragedy which swept its inhabitants off the face of the earth, and very probably were in the tavern at the moment the tragedy occurred, perhaps talking with this girl. So I thought at the moment.

"Naturally, I was deeply perplexed as to where the men and the girl might have come from, and also as to why the men were practically unhurt and the girl dead, dead for a great length of time, said Dr. Jamison, perhaps preserved by the cold. And, why and how did the men come gently to the earth, and why was the girl literally dashed to the ground? But all these puzzling questions were for the time being shoved into the background, so eager was I to get at the mystery which surrounded the Stillwater case.

"As I have already written, I had taken my place beside the bed of Wentworth, and listened eagerly for any hint he might drop in his delirium, for as he became warmed, he began to talk a great deal, though not always intelligibly. Some sentences and phrases could be made out, and these the nurse took down in shorthand. I copy a few of the sentences I heard as we bent over the bed:

"'Death-Walker . . . God of the Winds, you who walk on the wind . . . *adoramus te* . . . *adoramus te* . . . *adoramus te* . . . Destroy these faithless ones, you who walk with death, you who pass above the earth, you who have vanquished the sky. . . . Light gleams from the mosques of Baghdad . . . stars are born in the Sahara . . . Lhassa, lost Lhassa, worship, worship, worship the Lord of the Winds.'

"These enigmatic words were followed by a deep and profound silence, during which the man's breathing struck me as highly irregular. Dr. Jamison, who was there, noticed it also, commenting on it as a bad sign, though there was no intimation as to what might have brought on this sudden irregularity unless it were some unconscious excitement. The delirious jumble meanwhile continued, even more puzzling than before.

"Wind-Walker, disperse the fogs over England . . . *adoramus te* . . . It is too late to escape . . . Lord of the Winds. . . . Fly, fly or He will come. . . . Sacrifice, sacrifice . . . a sacrifice must be, yes, must be made. . . . Chosen one, Irene. Oh, Wind-Walker, sweep over Italy when the olive trees blossom . . . and the cedars of Lebanon, blue in the wind . . . cold-swept Russian steppes, over wolf-infested Siberia . . . onward to Africa, Africa. . . . Blackwood has written of these things . . . and there are

others . . . the old ones, elementals . . . and back to Leng, lost Leng, hidden Leng, whence sprung Wind-Walker . . . and other. . . .

"Dr. Jamison was much interested in the mention of 'elementals,' and since he appeared to know something of them, I asked him to explain. It seems that there still exists an age-old belief that there are elemental spirits—of fire, water, air and earth—all-powerful spirits subject to no one, spirits actually worshipped in some parts of the world. His excitement I thought rather exaggerated, and I shot questions at him.

"It is very difficult for me to chronicle what came out finally in answer to all my questions. It is something that had been kept carefully away from us, though how it could have been is puzzling to me. Even I hesitated at first to believe Dr. Jamison, though he appears to have known it for some time, and assures me that a number of people could tell odd stories if they wanted to. I remember that several anonymous reports of a highly suggestive nature were turned in to us, but I hardly dared suspect what lay behind them at the time.

"It seems that the inhabitants of Stillwater to a body performed a curious worship—not of any god we know, but of something they called an air elemental! A large thing, I am told, vaguely like a man, yet infinitely unlike him. Details are very distorted and unreliable. It is said to have been an air elemental, but there are weird hints of something of incredible age, that rose out of hidden fastness in the far north, from a frozen and impenetrable plateau up there. Of this I can venture nothing. Dr. Jamison mentions a 'Plateau of Leng,' of which I have never heard save in the incoherent babblings of Wentworth. But what is most horrible, most unbelievable in the mystery of this strange communal worship, is the suggestion that the people of Stillwater *made human sacrifices to their strange god!*

"There are queer stories of some gigantic thing that these people summoned to their deeply hidden forest altars, and still weirder tales of something seen against the sky in the glare of huge pine fires burning near Stillwater by travelers on the Olassie trail. How much credence it is advisable to give these stories you must decide for yourself, for I am, frankly, in view of later developments which I will chronicle in their order, unable to give any opinion. Dr. Jamison, whom I regard as a man of great intelligence, assures me that the elemental stories are sincerely believed hereabouts, and admitted to my surprise that he himself was unwilling to condemn belief without adequate knowledge. This was in effect, admitting that he himself might believe in them.

"The man Wentworth suddenly became conscious, and I turned from Dr. Jamison. He asked, naturally, where he was, and he was told. He did not seem surprised. He then asked what year this was, and when we told him expressed only an irritated surprise. He murmured something about, 'An even year, then,' and aroused our interest the more.

"'And Macdonald?' he asked then.

"'Here,' we answered.

"'How did we come?' he asked.

"'You fell from the sky.'

"'Unhurt?' He puzzled over this for a moment. Then he said, 'He put us down, then.'

"There was a girl with you,' said Dr. Jamison.

"She was dead,' he answered in a tired voice. Then he turned his strangely burning eyes on me and asked, 'You saw Him? You saw the thing that walked on the wind? . . . Then He will return for you, for none can see Him and escape.'

"We waited a few moments, thinking to give him time to become more fully conscious, but alas, he lapsed into a semi-conscious state. It was then that Dr. Jamison, after another examination, announced that the man was dying. This was naturally a great shock to me, and this shock was emphasized when Dr. Jamison added that the man Macdonald would in all probability die without ever gaining consciousness. The doctor could not guess at the cause of death, beyond referring vaguely to an assumption that perhaps these men had become so inured to cold that they could no longer stand warmth.

"At first I could not guess the significance of this statement, but it came to me suddenly that Dr. Jamison was simply accepting the notion, which had occurred to all of us, that these two men had spent the year just passed above the earth, perhaps in a region so cold that warmth would now affect them in the same manner as extreme cold.

"Despite Wentworth's semi-conscious state, I questioned him, and, surprisingly enough, got a rather jumbled story, which I have pieced together as well as I could from the notes the nurse took and from my own memory.

"It appears that these two men, Wentworth and Macdonald, had got into Stillwater quite late, owing to a sudden storm which had come up and put them off the trail for a short time. They were eyed with distinct disfavor at the tavern, but insisted on remaining for the night, which the tavern-keeper, Masitte, did not seem to like. But he gave them a room, requesting them to remain in it, and to keep away from the window. To this they agreed, despite the fact that they regarded the landlord's proposal as somewhat out of the ordinary.

"They had hardly come into the room when the inn-keeper's daughter, this girl, Irene, came in, and asked them to get her away from the town quickly. She had been chosen, she said, to be sacrificed to Ithaqua, the wind-walking elemental which the Stillwater people are said to have worshipped, and she had decided that she would flee, rather than die for a pagan god, of whose existence even she was not too sure.

"Yet, the girl's fear must have been convincing enough to impress the two men into going away with her. The inhabitants had recently, it seems, been working against the thing they had worshipped, and its anger had been felt. Because that night was the night of sacrifice, strangers were frowned upon. According to suggestions Wentworth made, he discovered that the Stillwater people had great altars in the pine forests nearby, and that they worshipped the thing they called variously Death-Walker or Wind-Walker at these altars. (Though you can imagine my skeptical view of this entire matter, this *does* seem to tie up with the stories of giant fires

which Dr. Jamison mentioned travelers on the Olassie trail as having seen.)

"There was also some very incoherent mumbling about the thing itself, vague and horrible thoughts which seemed to obsess Wentworth, something about the towering height of the thing seen against the sky in the hellish glow of the nocturnal fires.

"Exactly what happened, I hardly dare venture to guess at. Out of Wentworth's incoherent and troubled speech, there came only one positive statement, the substance of which was simply, that the three of them, Wentworth, Macdonald, and the girl, *did* flee the sacrificial fires and the village, and had been caught on the Olassie trail on the way to Nelson by the thing, which had picked them up and carried them along.

"After this statement, Wentworth became steadily more and more incoherent. He babbled a horrible story of the thing that swooped down after them as they fled in terror along the Olassie trail, and he blurted out, too, some terrible details of the mystery at Stillwater. From what I can make out, the thing that walked on the wind must have avenged itself, on the villagers not only for their previous coldness toward it, but also because of the flight of Irene Masiite, who had been chosen for the sacrifice. At any rate, between hysterical wails and shuddering adulations of the thing, there emerged from Wentworth's distorted speech a graphic and terrible picture of a giant monstrosity that came into the village from the forest, sweeping the people into the sky, seeking them out, one by one.

"I don't know how much of this I should chronicle for you, since I can understand what your attitude must be. Could it have been some animal, do you think? Some prehistoric animal which had lain hidden for years in the depths of the pine forest near Stillwater, that perhaps had been preserved alive by the cold and revived again by the warmth of the giant fires to become the god of the mad Stillwater people? This seems to me the only other logical explanation, but there still remain so many things not yet accounted for, that I think it would be much better to leave the Stillwater mystery among the unsolved cases.

"Macdonald died this morning at 10:07. Wentworth had not spoken since dawn, but he resumed shortly after Macdonald's death, repeating again the same vague sentences which we first heard from him. His incoherent murmurings leave us no alternative in regard to where he spent the past year. He seems to believe that he was carried along by this wind thing, this air clemental. Though it is fairly certain that neither of the missing men was anywhere reported throughout the past year, this story may be simply the product of an overburdened mind, a mind suffering from a great shock. And the seemingly vast knowledge of the hidden places of the earth, as well as the known, may have been derived from books.

"I say *may* have been derived, because in view of Wentworth's suggestive, almost convincing, murmurings, it becomes only a tentative possibility. I know of no book which chronicles the mystic rites at the Lamasery in Tibet, which tells of the secret ceremonies of the Lhassa monks. Nor do I know of any book which reveals the hidden life of the African Impi, nor of any pamphlet or monograph even so much as hinting at the forbidden and ac-

cursed designs of the Tcho-Tcho people of Burma, nor of anything ever written which suggests that there are strange hybrid men living under the snow and ice of Antarctica, that there exists today a lost kingdom of the sea, accursed R'lyeh, where slumbering Cthulhu, deep in the earth beneath the sea, is waiting to rise and destroy the world. Nor have I ever heard of the shunned and forbidden Plateau of Leng, where the Ancient Ones once ruled.

"Please do not think I exaggerate. I have never heard of these things before, yet Wentworth speaks as if he had been there, even hinting that these mysterious people have fed him. Of Lhassa I have heard vague hints, and of course I do remember having once seen a cinema containing what the producer called 'shots of Africa's vanishing Impi.' But of the other things, I know nothing. And if I can assume anything from the shuddering horror in Wentworth's semi-conscious voice as he spoke of these sudden things, I do not want to know anything.

"There was a constant reference, too, in Wentworth's mutterings, to a Blackwood, by whom he evidently meant the writer, Algernon Blackwood, a man who spent some time here in Canada, says Dr. Jamison. The doctor gave me one of this man's books, pointing out to me several strange stories of air elementals, stories remarkably similar in character to the curious Stillwater mystery, yet nothing so paradoxically definite and vague. I can refer you to these stories if you do not already know them.

"The doctor also gave me several old magazines, in which are stories by an American, a certain H. P. Lovecraft, which have to do with Cthulhu, with the lost sea kingdom of R'lyeh and the forbidden Plateau of Leng. Perhaps these are the sources of Wentworth's apparently authentic information, yet in none of these stories appears any of the horrific details of which Wentworth speaks so familiarly.

"Wentworth died at 3:21 this afternoon. An hour before, he passed into a coma from which he did not emerge again. Dr. Jamison and the coroner seemed to think that the exposure to warmth had killed the two men, Jamison telling me candidly that a year with the Wind-Walker had so inured the men to cold, that warmth like ours affected them as extreme cold would affect us normal men.

"You must understand that Dr. Jamison was entirely serious. Yet, his medical report read that the two men and the girl had died from exposure to the cold. In explanation he said, 'I may think what I please, Norris, and I may believe what I please—but I dare not write it!' Then, after a pause, he said, 'And, if you are wise, you will withhold the names of these people from the general public because questions are certain to arise once they become known, and how are you people going to explain their coming to us from the sky, and where they spent the year since the Stillwater mystery? And finally, how are you going to react against the storm of criticism which will fall on you once more when the Stillwater case is reopened with such strangely unbelievable facts as we have gathered here from the lips of a dying man?'

"I think Dr. Jamison is right. I have no opinion to offer, absolutely none, and I am making this report only because it is my duty as an officer to do so, and I am making it only to you. Perhaps it had better be destroyed, rather

than kept in our files from which it might at some future time be resurrected by a careless official or an inquiring newspaper man.

"As I have already told you, any opinion that I have to offer would be worthless. But, in closing, I want to point out two things to you. I want to refer you first to the report of Peter Herrick, in charge of the investigation at Stillwater last year, under date of 3 March, 1930. I quote from the report which I have at hand:

"On the Olassie trail, about three miles below Stillwater, we came upon the meandering tracks of three people. An examination of the tracks seemed to indicate that there were two men and one woman. A dog sled had been left behind along the trail, and for some inexplicable reason these three people had started running along the trail toward Nelson, evidently away from Stillwater. The tracks halted abruptly, and there was no trace of where they might have gone. Since there had been no snow since the night of the Stillwater mystery, this is doubly puzzling; it is as if the three people had been lifted off the earth.

"Another puzzling factor is the appearance, far off to one side of this point in the trail, in a line with the wandering footsteps of the three travelers, of a huge imprint, closely resembling the foot of a man—but certainly a giant—which appears to have been made by an unbelievably large thing, and the foot, though like that of a man, must have been webbed!"

"To this I want to add some information of my own. I remember that last night, when I threw that startled glance into the sky and saw that the stars had been blotted out, I thought that the 'cloud' which had obscured the sky looked curiously like the outline of a great man. And I remember, too, that where the top of the 'cloud' must have been, where the head of the thing should have been, there were two gleaming stars, visible despite the shadow, two gleaming stars, burning bright—*like eyes!*!"

"One more thing. This afternoon, a half mile behind Dr. Jamison's house, I came upon a deep depression in the snow. I did not need a second glance to tell me what it was. A half mile on the other side of the house there is another imprint like this; I am only thankful that the sun is rapidly distorting the outlines, for I am only too willing to believe that I have imagined them. *For they are the imprints of gigantic feet, and the feet must have been webbed!"*

Thus ends Robert Norris's strange report. Because he had carried it for some time with him, I did not receive the report until after I had learned of his disappearance. The report was posted to me on the 6th of March. Under date of March 5th, Norris has scrawled a final brief and terrible message in a hand which is barely legible:

"5 March—Something is pursuing me! Not a night has passed since the occurrence at Navissa Camp to give me any rest. Always I have felt strange, horrible, yet invisible eyes looking down at me from above. And I remember Wentworth saying that none could live who had seen the thing that walked on the wind, and I cannot forget the sight of it against the sky, and its burning eyes looking down like stars in the haunted night! It is waiting."

It was this brief paragraph which caused our official physician to declare

that Robert Norris had lost his mind, and had wandered away to some hidden place from which he emerged months later only to die in snow.

I want to add only a few words of my own. Robert Norris did not lose his mind. Furthermore, Robert Norris was one of the most thorough, the keenest men under my orders, and even during the terrible months he spent in far places, I am sure he did not lose possession of his senses. I grant our physician only one thing: Robert Norris *had* gone away to some hidden place for those months. But that hidden place was not in Canada, no, nor in North America, whatever our physician may think.

I arrived at Navissa Camp by plane within ten hours of the discovery of Robert Norris's body. As I flew over the spot where the body was found, I saw far away on either side, deep depressions in the snow. I have no doubt what they were. It was I, too, who searched Norris's clothes, and found in his pockets the mementoes he had brought with him from the hidden places where he had been: the gold plaque, depicting in miniature a struggle between ancient beings, and bearing on its surface inscriptions in weird designs, the plaque which Dr. Spencer of Quebec University affirms must have come from some place incredibly old, yet is excellently preserved; the incredible geological fragment which, confined in any walled place, gives off the growing hum and roar of winds far, far beyond the rim of the known universel

# *Raiders of the Universes*

by Donald Wandrei

We have always felt that something has been lost in the transition of science-fiction from its pioneer phase to its modern streamlined form. Just what that something is is hard to define, but we might begin by saying it is the touch of the breath-taking, the sense of wonder, the hint of the saga. It is that that makes "Raiders of the Universes" something just a bit more than a formula pulp story. For the author, Donald Wandrei, started his literary career as a young poet, a weird tales enthusiast, and his earliest efforts were prose-poetry about the ultimate fate of the cosmos. This story, the story of Phobar and the Dark Star, clearly belongs to his period of transition, the conscious effort to write to fit a magazine's demands—in this instance, the very early "Clayton" Astounding Stories—in which story there is reflected nevertheless the deep velvet of a poet's far-space thoughts.



T WAS IN THE thirty-fourth century that the dark star began its famous conquest, unparalleled in stellar annals. Phobar the astronomer discovered it. He was sweeping the heavens with one of the newly-invented multipowered Sussendorf comet-hunters when something caught his eye—a new star of great brilliance in the foreground of the constellation Hercules.

For the rest of the night, he cast aside all his plans and concentrated on the one star. He witnessed an unprecedented event. Mercia's nullifier had just been invented, a curious and intricate device, based on four-dimensional geometry, that made it possible to see occurrences in the universe which had hitherto required the hundreds of years needed for light to cross the intervening space before they were visible on Earth. By a hasty calculation with the aid of this invention, Phobar found that the new star was about three thousand light years distant, and that it was hurtling backward into space at the rate of twelve hundred miles per second. The remarkable feature of his discovery was this appearance of a fourth-magnitude star where none had been known to exist. Perhaps it had come into existence this very night.

On the succeeding night, he was given a greater surprise. In line with the first star, but several hundred light-years nearer, was a second new star of even more brightness. And it, too, was hurtling backward into space at approximately twelve hundred miles per second. Phobar was astonished. Two new stars discovered within twenty-four hours in the same part of the heavens, both of the fourth magnitude! But his surprise was as nothing when on the succeeding night, even while he watched, a third new star appeared in line with these, but much closer.

At midnight he first noticed a pin-point of faint light; by one o'clock the

star was of eighth magnitude. At two it was a brilliant sun of the second magnitude blazing away from Earth like the others at a rate of twelve hundred miles per second. And on the next evening, and the next, and the next, other new stars appeared until there were seven in all, every one on a line in the same constellation Hercules, every one with the same radiance and the same proper motion, though of varying size.

Phobar had broadcast his discovery to incredulous astronomers; but as star after star appeared nightly, all the telescopes on Earth were turned toward one of the most spectacular cataclysms that history recorded. Far out in the depths of space, with unheard-of regularity and unheard-of precision, new worlds were flaming up overnight in a line that began at Hercules and extended toward the solar system.

Phobar's announcement was immediately flashed to Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, the other members of the Five World Federation. Saturn reported no evidence of the phenomena, because of the interfering rings, and the lack of Mercia's nullifier. But Jupiter, with a similar device, witnessed the phenomena and announced furthermore that many stars in the neighborhood of the novae had begun to deviate in singular and abrupt fashion from their normal positions.

There was not as yet much popular interest in the phenomena. Without Mercia's nullifier, the stars were not visible to ordinary eyes, since the light-rays would take years to reach the Earth. But every astronomer who had access to Mercia's nullifier hastened to focus his telescope on the region where extraordinary events were taking place out in the unfathomable gulf of night. Some terrific force was at work, creating worlds and disturbing the positions of stars within a radius already known to extend billions and trillions of miles from the path of the seven new stars. But of the nature of that force, astronomers could only guess.

Phobar took up his duties early on the eighth night. The last star had appeared about five hundred light-years distant. If an eighth new star was found, it should be not more than a few light-years away. But nothing happened. All night Phobar kept his telescope pointed at the probable spot, but search as he might, the heavens showed nothing new. In the morning he sought eagerly for news of any discovery made by fellow-watchers, but they, too, had found nothing unusual. Could it be that the mystery would now fade away, a new riddle of the skies?

The next evening, he took up his position once more, training his telescope on the seven bright stars, and then on the region where an eighth, if there were one, should appear. For hours he searched the abyss in vain. He could find none. Apparently the phenomena were ended. At midnight he took a last glance before entering on some tedious calculations. It was there! In the center of the telescope a faint, hazy object steadily grew in brightness. All his problems were forgotten as Phobar watched the eighth star increase hourly. Closer than any other, closer even than Alpha Centauri, the new sun appeared, scarcely three light-years away across the void surrounding the solar system. And all the while he watched, he witnessed a thing no man had ever before seen—the birth of a world!

By one o'clock, the new star was of fifth magnitude; by two it was of the first. As the faint flush of dawn began to come toward the close of that frosty, moonless November night, the new star was a great white-hot object more brilliant than any other star in the heavens. Phobar knew that when its light finally reached Earth so that ordinary eyes could see, it would be the most beautiful object in the night sky. What was the reason for these unparalleled births of worlds and the terrifying mathematical precision that characterized them?

Whatever the cosmic force behind, it was progressing toward the solar system. Perhaps it would even disturb the balance of the planets. The possible chance of such an event had already called the attention of some astronomers, but the whole phenomenon was too inexplicable to permit more than speculation.

The next evening was cloudy. Jupiter reported nothing new except that Neptune had deviated from its course and tended to pursue an erratic and puzzling new orbit.

Phobar pondered long over this last news item and turned his attention to the outermost planet on the succeeding night. To his surprise, he had great difficulty in locating it. The ephemeris was of absolutely no use. When he did locate Neptune after a brief search, he discovered it more than eighty million miles from its scheduled place! This was at one-forty. At two-ten he was thunderstruck by a special announcement sent from the Central Bureau to every observatory and astronomer of note throughout the world, proclaiming the discovery of an ultra-Plutonian planet. Phobar was incredulous. For centuries it had been proved that no planet beyond Pluto could possibly exist.

With feverish haste, Phobar ran to the huge telescope and rapidly focused it where the new planet should be. Five hundred million miles beyond Neptune was a flaming path like the beam of a giant searchlight that extended exactly to the eighth solar planet. Phobar gasped. He could hardly credit the testimony of his eyes. He looked more closely. The great stream of flame still crossed his line of vision. But this time he saw something else: at the precise farther end of the flame path was a round disk—dark!

Beyond a doubt, a new planet of vast size now formed an addition to the solar group. But that planet was almost impervious to the illuminating rays of the sun and was barely discernible. Neptune itself shone brighter than it ever had, and was falling away from the sun at a rate of twelve hundred miles per second.

All night Phobar watched the double mystery. By three o'clock, he was convinced, as far as lightning calculations showed, that the invader was hurtling toward the sun at a speed of more than ten million miles an hour. At three-fifteen, he thought that vanishing Neptune seemed brighter even than the band of fire running to the invader. At four, his belief was certainty. With amazement and awe, Phobar sat through the long, cold night, watching a spectacular and terrible catastrophe in the sky.

As dawn began to break and the stars grew paler, Phobar turned away from his telescope, his brain awhirl, his heart filled with a great fear. He had witnessed the devastation of a world, the ruin of a member of his own plane-

tary system by an invader from outer space. As dawn cut short his observations, he knew at last the cause of Neptune's brightness, knew that it was now a white-hot flaming sun that sped with increased rapidity away from the solar system. Somehow, the terrible swathe of fire that flowed from the dark star to Neptune had wrenched it out of its orbit and made of it a molten inferno.

At dawn came another bulletin from the Central Bureau. Neptune had a surface temperature of 3,000° C, was defying all laws of celestial mechanics, and within three days would have left the solar system for ever. The results of such a disaster were unpredictable. The entire solar system was likely to break up. Already Uranus and Jupiter had deviated from their orbits. Unless something speedily occurred to check the onrush of the dark star, it was prophesied that the laws governing the planetary system would run to a new balance and that in the ensuing chaos the whole group would spread apart and fall toward the gulfs beyond the great surrounding void.

What was the nature of the great path of fire? What force did it represent? And was the dark star controlled by intelligence, or was it a blind wanderer from space that had come by accident? The flame-path alone implied that the dark star was guided by an intelligence that possessed the secret of inconceivable power. Menace hung in the sky now where all eyes could see in a great arc of fire!

The world was on the brink of eternity, and vast forces at whose nature men could only guess were sweeping planets and suns out of its path.

The following night was again cold and clear. High in the heavens, where Neptune should have been, hung a disk of enormously greater size. Neptune itself was almost invisible, hundreds of millions of miles beyond its scheduled position. As nearly as Phobar could estimate, not one hundredth of the sun's rays were reflected from the surface of the dark star, a proportion far below those for the other planets. Phobar had a better view of the flame-path, and it was with growing awe that he watched that strange swathe in the sky during the dead of night. It shot out from the dark star like a colossal beam or huge pillar of fire seeking a food of worlds.

With a shiver of cold fear he saw that there were now three of the bands: one toward Neptune, one toward Saturn, and one toward the sun. The first was fading, a milky, misty white; the second shone almost as bright as the first one previously had; and the third, toward the sun, was a dazzling stream of orange radiance, burning with a steady, terrible, unbelievable intensity across two and a half billions of miles of space! That gigantic flare was the most brilliant sight in the whole night sky, an awful and abysmally prophetic flame that made city streets black with staring people, a radiance whose grandeur and terrific implication of cosmic power brought beauty and the fear of doom into the heavens!

Those paths could not be explained by all the physicists and all the astronomers in the Five World Federation. They possessed the properties of light, but they were rigid bands like a tube or a solid pillar from which only the faintest of rays escaped; and they completely shut off the heavens behind them. They had, moreover, singular properties which could not be described, as if a new force were embodied in them. .

Hour after hour humanity watched the spectacular progress of the dark star, watched those mysterious and threatening paths of light that flowed from the invader. When dawn came, it brought only a great fear and the oppression of impending disaster.

In the early morning, Phobar slept. When he awoke, he felt refreshed and decided to take a short walk in the familiar and peaceful light of day. He never took that walk. He opened the door on a kind of dim and reddish twilight. Not a cloud hung in the sky, but the sun shone feebly with a dull red glow, and the skies were dull and somber, as if the sun were dying as scientists had predicted it eventually would.

Phobar stared at the dull heavens in a daze, at the foreboding atmosphere and the livid sun that burned faintly as through a smoke curtain. Then the truth flashed on him—it was the terrible path of fire from the dark star! By what means he could not guess, by what appalling control of immense and inconceivable forces he could not even imagine, the dark star was sucking light and perhaps more than light from the sun!

Phobar turned and shut the door. The world had seen its last dawn. If the purpose of the dark star was destruction, none of the planets could offer much opposition, for no weapon of theirs was effective beyond a few thousand miles range at most—and the dark star could span millions. If the invader passed on, its havoc would be only a trifle smaller, for it had already destroyed two members of the solar system and was now striking at its most vital part. Without the sun, life would die, but even with the sun the planets must rearrange themselves because of the destruction of balance.

Even he could hardly grasp the vast and abysmal catastrophe that without warning had swept from space. How could the dark star have traversed three thousand light-years of space in a week's time? It was unthinkable! So stupendous a control of power, so gigantic a manipulation of cosmic forces, so annihilating a possession of the greatest secrets of the universe, was an unheard-of concentration of energy and knowledge of stellar mechanics. But the evidence of his own eyes and the path of the dark star with flaming suns to mark its progress, told him in language which could not be refuted that the dark star possessed all that immeasurable, titanic knowledge. It was the lord of the universe. There was nothing which the dark star could not crush or conquer or change. The thought of that immense, supreme power numbed his mind. It opened vistas of a civilization, and a progress, and an unparalleled mastery of all knowledge which was almost beyond conception.

Already the news had raced across the world. On Phobar's television screen flashed scenes of nightmare; the radio spewed a gibberish of terror. In one day panic had swept the Earth; on the remaining members of the Five World Federation the same story was repeated. Rioting mobs drowned out the chant of religious fanatics who hailed Judgment Day. Great fires turned the air murky and flame-shot. Machine guns spat regularly in city streets; looting, murder, and fear-crazed crimes were universal. Civilization had completely vanished overnight.

The tides roared higher than they ever had before; for every thousand people drowned on the American seabords, a hundred thousand perished in

China and India. Dead volcanoes boomed into the worst eruptions known. Half of Japan sank during the most violent earthquake in history. Land rocked, the seas boiled, cyclones howled out of the skies. A billion eyes focused on Mecca, the mad beating of tom-toms rolled across all Africa, women and children were trampled to death by the crowds that jammed into churches.

"Has man lived in vain?" asked the philosopher.

"The world is doomed. There is no escape," said the scientist.

"The day of reckoning has come! The wrath of God is upon us!" shouted the street preachers.

In a daze, Phobar switched off the bedlam and, walking like a man asleep, strode out, he did not care where, if only to get away.

The ground and the sky were like a dying fire. The sun seemed a half-dead cinder. Only the great swathe of radiance between the sun and the dark star had any brilliance. Sinister, menacing, now larger even than the sun, the invader from beyond hung in the heavens.

As Phobar watched it, the air around him prickled strangely. A sixth sense gave warning. He turned to race back into his house. His legs failed. A fantastic orange light bathed him, countless needles of pain shot through his whole body, the world was darkened.

Earth had somehow been blotted out. There was a brief blackness, the nausea of space and of a great fall that compressed eternity into a moment. Then a swimming confusion, and outlines which gradually came to rest.

Phobar was too utterly amazed to cry out or run. He stood inside the most titanic edifice he could have imagined, a single gigantic structure vaster than all New York City. Far overhead swept a black roof fading into the horizon, beneath his feet was the same metal substance. In the midst of this giant work soared the base of a tower that pierced the roof thousands of feet above.

Everywhere loomed machines, enormous dynamos, cathode tubes a hundred feet long, masses and mountains of such fantastic apparatus as he had never encountered. The air was bluish, electric. From the black substance came a phosphorescent radiance. The triumphant drone of motors and a terrific crackle of electricity were everywhere. Off to his right purple-blue flames the size of Sequoia trees flickered around a group of what looked like condensers as huge as Gibraltar. At the base of the central tower half a mile distant Phobar could see something that resembled a great switchboard studded with silver controls. Near it was a series of mechanisms at whose purpose he could not even guess.

All this his astounded eyes took in at one confused glance. The thing that gave him unreasoning terror was the hundred-foot-high metal monster before him. It defied description. It was unlike any color known on earth, a blinding color sinister with power and evil. Its shape was equally ambiguous—it rippled like quicksilver, now compact, now spread out in a thousand limbs. But what appalled Phobar was its definite possession of rational life. More, its very thoughts were transmitted to him as clearly as though written in his own English:

"Follow me!"

Phobar's mind did not function—but his legs moved regularly. In the grasp of this mental, metal monster he was a mere automaton. Phobar noticed idly that he had to step down from a flat disk a dozen yards across. By some power, some tremendous discovery that he could not understand, he had been transported across millions of miles of space—undoubtedly to the dark star itself!

The colossal thing, indescribable, a blinding, nameless color, rippled down the hall and stooped before a disk of silvery black. In the center of the disk was a metal seat with a control board nearby.

"Be seated!"

Phobar sat down, the titan flicked the controls—and nothing happened. Phobar sensed that something was radically wrong. He felt the surprise of his gigantic companion. He did not know it then, but the fate of the solar system hung on that incident.

"Come!"

Abruptly the giant stooped, and Phobar shrank back, but a flowing mass of cold, insensate metal swept around him, lifted him fifty feet in the air. Dizzy, sick, horrified, he was hardly conscious of the whirlwind motion into which the giant suddenly shot. He had a dim impression of machines racing by, of countless other giants, of a sudden opening in the walls of the immense building, and then a rush across the surface of metal land. Even in his vertigo he had enough curiosity to marvel that there was no vegetation, no water, only the dull black metal everywhere. Yet there was air.

And then a city loomed before them. To Phobar it seemed a city of gods or giants. Fully five miles it soared toward space, its fantastic angles and arcs and cubes and pyramids making the dimensions of a totally alien geometry. Tier by tier the stupendous city, hundreds of miles wide, mounted toward a central tower like the one in the building he had left.

Phobar never knew how they got there, but his numbed mind was at last forced into clarity by a greater will. He stared about him. His captor had gone. He stood in a huge chamber circling to a dome far overhead. Before him, on a dais a full thousand feet in diameter, stood—sat—rested, whatever it might be called—another monster, far larger than any he had yet seen, like a mountain of pliant thinking, living metal. And Phobar knew he stood in the presence of the ruler.

The metal Cyclops surveyed him as Phobar might have surveyed an ant. Cold, deadly, dispassionate scrutiny came from something that might have been eyes, or a seeing intelligence locked in a metal body.

There was no sound, but inwardly to Phobar's consciousness from the peak of the titan far above him came a command:

"What are you called?"

Phobar opened his lips—but even before he spoke, he knew that the thing had understood his thought: "Phobar."

"I am Garboreggg, ruler of Xlarbti, the Lord of the Universes."

"Lord of the *Universes*?"

"I and my world come from one of the universes beyond the reach of your

telescopes." Phobar somehow felt that the thing was talking to him as he would to a new-born babe.

"What do you want of me?"

"Tell your Earth that I want the entire supply of your radium ores mined and placed above ground according to the instructions I give, by seven of your days hence."

A dozen questions sprang to Phobar's lips. He felt again that he was being treated like a child.

"Why do you want our radium ores?"

"Because they are the rarest of the elements on your scile, are absent on ours, and supply us with some of the tremendous energy we need."

"Why don't you obtain the ores from other worlds?"

"We do. We are taking them from all worlds where they exist. But we need yours also."

Raiders of the universe! Looting young worlds of the precious radium ores! Piracy on a cosmic scale!

"And if Earth refuses your demand?"

For answer, Garboreggg rippled to a wall of the room and pressed a button. The wall dissolved, weirdly, mysteriously. A series of vast silver plates was revealed, and a battery of control levers.

"This will happen to all of your Earth unless the ores are given us."

The titan closed a switch. On the first screen flashed the picture of a huge tower such as Phobar had seen in the metal city.

Garboreggg adjusted a second control that was something like a range-finder. He pressed a third lever—and from the tower leaped a surge of terrific energy, like a bolt of lightning a quarter of a mile broad. The giant closed another switch—and on the second plate flashed a picture of New York City.

Then—waiting. Seconds, minutes drifted by. The atmosphere became tense, nerve-cracking. Phobar's eyes ached with the intensity of his stare. What would happen?

Abruptly it came.

A monstrous bolt of energy streaked from the skies, purple-blue death in a pillar a fourth of a mile broad crashed into the heart of New York City swept up and down Manhattan, across and back, and suddenly vanished.

In fifteen seconds, only a molten hell of fused structures and incinerated millions of human beings remained of the world's first city.

Phobar was crushed, appalled, then utter loathing for this soulless thing poured through him. If only—

"It is useless. You can do nothing," answered the ruler as though it had grasped his thought.

"But why, if you could pick me off the Earth, do you not draw the radium ores in the same way?" Phobar demanded.

"The orange-ray picks up only loose, portable objects. We can and will transport the radium ores here by means of the ray after they have been mined and placed on platforms or disks."

"Why did you select me from all the millions of people on Earth?"

"Solely because you were the first apparent scientist whom our cosmotel

chanced upon. It will be up to you to notify your Earth governments of our demand."

"But afterwards!" Phobar burst out aloud. "What then?"

"We will depart."

"It will mean death to us! The solar system will be wrecked with Neptune gone and Saturn following it!"

Garboreggg made no answer. To that impassive, cold, inhuman thing, it did not matter if a nation or a whole world perished. Phobar had already seen with what deliberate calm it destroyed a city, merely to show him what power the lords of Xlarbt controlled. Besides, what guarantee was there that the invaders would not loot the Earth of everything they wanted and then annihilate all life upon it before they departed? Yet Phobar knew he was helpless, knew that the men of Earth would be forced to do whatever was asked of them, and trust that the raiders would fulfill their promise.

"Two hours remain for your stay here," came the ruler's dictum to interrupt his line of thought. "For the first half of that period you will tell me of your world and answer whatever questions I may ask. During the rest of the interval, I will explain some of the things you wish to learn about us."

Again Phobar felt Garboreggg's disdain, knew that the metal giant regarded him as a kind of childish plaything for an hour or two's amusement. But he had no choice, and so he told Garboreggg of the life on Earth, how it arose and along what lines it had developed; he narrated in brief the extent of man's knowledge, his scientific achievements, his mastery of weapons and forces and machines, his social organization.

When he had finished, he felt as a Stone Age man might feel in the presence of a brilliant scientist of the thirty-fourth century. If any sign of interest had shown on the peak of the metallic lord, Phobar failed to see it. But he sensed an intolerant sneer of ridicule in Garboreggg, as though the ruler considered these statements to be only the most elementary of facts.

Then, for three quarters of an hour, in the manner of one lecturing an ignorant pupil, the giant crowded its thought pictures into Phobar's mind so that finally he understood a little of the raiders and of the sudden terror that had flamed from the abysses into the solar system.

"The universe of matter that you know is only one of the countless universes which comprise the cosmos," began Garboreggg. "In your universe, you have a scale of ninety-two elements, you have your color-spectrum, your rays and waves of many kinds. You are subject to definite laws controlling matter and energy as you know them.

"But we are of a different universe, on a different scale from yours, a trillion light-years away in space, eons distant in time. The natural laws which govern us differ from those controlling you. In our universe, you would be hopelessly lost, completely helpless, unless you possessed the knowledge that your people will not attain even in millions of years. But we, who are so much older and greater than you, have for so long studied the nature of the other universes that we can enter and leave them at will, taking what we wish, doing as we wish, creating or destroying worlds whenever the need arises, coming and hurtling away when we choose.

"There is no vegetable life in our universe. There is only the scale of elements ranging from 842 to 966 on the extension of your own scale. At this high range, metals of complex kinds exist. There is none of what you call water, no vegetable world, no animal kingdom. Instead, there are energies, forces, rays, and waves, which are food to us and which nourish our life-stream just as pigs, potatoes, and bread are food to you.

"Trillions of years ago in your time-calculation, but only a few dozen centuries ago in ours, life arose on the giant world Kygpton in our universe. It was life, our life, the life of my people and myself, intelligence animating bodies of pliant metal, existing almost endlessly on an almost inexhaustible source of energy.

"But all matter wears down. On Kygpton there was a variety of useful metals, others that were valueless. There was comparatively little of the first, much of the second. Kygpton itself was a world as large as your entire solar system, with a diameter roughly of four billion miles. Our ancestors knew that Kygpton was dying, that the store of our most precious element Sthalreh was dwindling. But already our ancestors had mastered the forces of our universe, had made inventions that are beyond your understanding, had explored the limits of our universe in spacecars that were propelled by the free energies in space and by the attracting-repelling influences of stars.

"The metal inhabitants of Kygpton employed every invention they knew to accomplish an engineering miracle that makes your bridges and mines seem but the puny efforts of a gnat. They blasted all the remaining ores of Sthalreh from the surface and interior of Kygpton and refined them. Then they created a gigantic vacuum, a dead-field in space a hundred million miles away from their world. The dead-field was controlled from Kygpton by atomic projectors, energy-absorbers, gravitation-nullifiers and cosmotels, range-regulators, and a host of other inventions.

"As fast as it was mined and extracted, the Sthalreh metal was vaporized, shot into the dead-field by interstellar rays, and solidified there along an invisible framework which we projected. In a decade of our time, we had pillaged Kygpton of every particle of Sthalreh. And then in our skies hung an artificial world, a manufactured sphere, a giant new planet, the world you yourself are now on—Xlarbt!

"We did not create a solid globe. We left chambers, tunnels, passageways, storerooms throughout it or piercing it from surface to surface. Thus, even as Xlarbt was being created we provided for everything that we needed or could need—experimental laboratories, sub-surface vaults, chambers for the innumerable huge ray dynamos, energy storage batteries, and other apparatus which we required.

"And when all was ready, we transferred by space-cars and by atomic individuation all our necessities from Kygpton to the artificial world Xlarbt. And when everything was prepared, we destroyed the dead-field by duplicate control from Xlarbt, turned our repulsion-power on full against the now useless and dying giant world Kygpton, and swung upon our path.

"But our whole universe is incredibly old. It was mature before ever your young suns flamed out of the gaseous nebulæ, it was decaying when your

molten planets were flung from the central sun, it was dying before the boiling seas had given birth to land upon your sphere. And while we had enough of our own particular electrical food to last us for a million of your years, and enough power to guide Xlarbti to other universes, we had exhausted all the remaining energy of our entire universe. And when we finally left it to dwindle behind us in the black abysses of space, we left it, a dead cinder, devoid of life, vitiated of activity, and utterly lacking in cosmic forces, a universe finally run down.

"The universes, as you may know, are set off from each other by totally black and empty abysses, expanses so vast that light-rays have not yet crossed many of them. How did we accomplish the feat of traversing such a gulf? By the simplest of means: acceleration. Why? Because to remain in our universe meant inevitable death. We gambled on the greatest adventure in all the cosmos.

"To begin with, we circled our universe to the remotest point opposite where we wanted to leave it. We then turned our attraction powers on part way so that the millions of stars before us drew us ahead, then we gradually stepped up the power to its full strength, thus ever increasing our speed. At the same time, as stars passed to our rear in our flight, we turned our repulsion-rays against them, stepping that power up also.

"Our initial speed was twenty-four miles per second. Midway in our universe we had reached the speed of your light—186,000 miles per second. By the time we left our universe, we were hurtling at a speed which we estimated to be 1,600,000,000 miles per second. Yet even at that tremendous speed, it took us years to cross from our universe to yours. If we had encountered even a planetoid at that enormous rate, we would probably have been annihilated in white-hot death. But we had planned well, and there are no superiors to our stellar mechanics, our astronomers, our scientists.

"When we finally hurtled from the black void into your universe, we found what we had only dared hope for: a young universe, with many planets and cooling worlds rich in radium ores, the only element in your scale that can help to replenish our vanishing energy. Half your universe we have already deprived of its ores. Your Earth has more than we want. Then we shall continue on our way, to loot the rest of the worlds, before passing on to another universe. We are a planet without a universe. We will wander and pillage until we find a universe like the one we come from, or until Xlarbti itself disintegrates and we perish.

"We could easily wipe out all the dwellers on Earth and mine the ores ourselves. But that would be a needless waste of our powers, for since you can not defy us, and since the desire for life burns as high in you as in us and as it does in all sensate things in all universes, your people will save themselves from death and save us from wasting energy by mining the ores for us. What happens afterwards, we do not care.

"The seven new suns that you saw were dead worlds that we used as buffers to slow down Xlarbti. The full strength of our repulsion-force directed against any single world necessarily turns it into a liquid or gaseous state depending on various factors. Your planet Neptune was pulled out of the

solar system by the attraction of Xlarbt's mass. The flame-paths, as you call them, are directed streams of energy for different purposes: the one to the sun supplies us, for instance, with heat, light, and electricity, which in turn are stored up for eventual use.

"The orange-ray that you felt is one of our achievements. It is similar to the double-action pumps used in some of your sulphur mines, whereby a pipe is inclosed in a larger pipe, and hot water forced down through the larger tubing returns sulphur-laden through the central pipe. The orange-ray instantaneously dissolves any portable object up to a certain size, propels it back to Xlarbt through its center which is the reverse ray, and here reforms the object, just as you were recreated on the disk that you stood on when you regained consciousness.

"But I have not enough time to explain everything on Xlarbt to you; nor would you comprehend it all if I did. Your stay is almost up.

"In that one control-panel lies all the power that we have mastered," boasted Garboregg with supreme egotism. "It connects with the individual controls throughout Xlarbt."

"What is the purpose of some of the levers?" asked Phobar, with a desperate hope in his thoughts.

A filament of metal whipped to the panel from the lord of Xlarbt. "This first section duplicates the control-panel that you saw in the laboratory where you opened your eyes. Do not think that you can make use of this information—in ten minutes you will be back on your Earth to deliver our command. Between now and that moment you will be so closely watched that you can do nothing and will have no opportunity to try.

"This first lever controls the attraction rays, the second the repulsion force. The third dial regulates the orange-ray by which you will be returned to Earth. The fourth switch directs the electrical bolt that destroyed New York City. Next it is a device that we have never had occasion to use. It releases the Krangor-wave throughout Xlarbt. Its effect is to make each atom of Xlarbt, the Sthalreh metal and everything on it become compact, to do away with the empty spaces that exist in every atom. Theoretically, it would reduce Xlarbt to a fraction of its present size, diminish its mass while its weight and gravity remained as before.

"The next lever controls matter to be transported between here and the first laboratory. Somewhat like the orange-ray, it disintegrates the object and reassembles it here."

So that was what Phobar's captor had been trying to do with him back there in the laboratory! "Why was I not brought here by that means?" burst out Phobar.

"Because you belong to a different universe," answered Garboregg.

"Without experimentation, we cannot tell what natural laws of ours you would not be subject to, but this is one of them." A gesture of irritation seemed to come from him.

"Some laws hold good in all the universes we have thus far investigated. The orange-ray, for instance, picked you up as it would have plucked one of us from the surface of Kygpton. But on Xlarbt, which is composed entirely

of Sthalreh, your atomic nature and physical constitution are so different from ours that they were unaffected by the energy that ordinarily transports objects here."

Thus the metal nightmare went rapidly over the control-panel. At length Phobar's captor, or another thing like him, re-entered when Garboreggg flicked a strange-looking protuberance on the panel.

"You will now be returned to your world," came the thought of Garboreggg. "We shall watch you through our cosmotel to see that you deliver our instructions. Unless the nations of Earth obey us, they will be obliterated at the end of seven days."

A wild impulse to smash that impassive, metallic monster passed from Phobar as quickly as it came. He was helpless. Sick and despairing, he felt the cold, baffling-colored metal close around him again; once more he was borne aloft for the journey to the laboratory, from there to be propelled back to Earth.

Seven days of grace! But Phobar knew that less than ten minutes remained to him. Only here could he possibly accomplish anything. Once off the surface of Xlarbt, there was not the remotest chance that all the nations of Earth could reach the invaders or even attempt to defy them. Yet what could he alone do in a week, to say nothing of ten minutes?

He sensed the amused, supercilious contempt of his captor. That was really the greatest obstacle, this ability of theirs to read thought-pictures. And already he had given them enough word-pictures of English so that they could understand. . . .

In back of Phobar's mind the ghost of a desperate thought suddenly came. What was it he had learned years ago in college? Homer—"The Odyssey"—Plutarch. . . . From rusty, disused corners of memory crept forth the half-forgotten words. He bent all his efforts to the task, not daring to think ahead or plan ahead or visualize anything but the Greek words.

He felt the bewilderment of his captor. To throw it off the track, Phobar suddenly let an ancient English nursery rime slip into his thoughts. The disgust that emanated from his captor was laughable; Phobar could have shouted aloud. But the Greek words. . . .

Already the pair had left the mountain-high titan city far behind; they rippled across the smooth, black surface of Xlarbt, and bore like rifle bullets down on the swiftly-looming laboratory. In a few minutes it would be too late forever. Now the lost Greek words burst into Phobar's mind, and, hoping against hope, he thought in Greek word-pictures which his captor could not understand. He weighed chances, long shots. Into his brain flashed an idea. . . . But they were upon the laboratory; a stupendous door dissolved weirdly into shimmering haze; they sped through.

Phobar's hand clutched a bulge in his pocket. Would it work? How could it?

They were beyond the door now and racing across the great expanse of the floor, past the central tower, past the control-panel which he had first seen. . . .

And as if by magic there leaped into Phobar's mind a clear-cut, vivid

picture of violet oceans of energy crackling and streaking from the heavens to crash through the laboratory roof and barely miss striking his captor behind. Even as Phobar created the image of that terrific death, his captor whirled around in a lightning movement, a long arm of metal flicking outward at the same instant to drop Phobar to the ground.

Like a flash Phobar was on his feet; his hand whipped from his pocket, and with all his strength he flung a gleaming object straight toward the fifth lever on the control-panel a dozen yards away. As a clumsy arrow would, his oversize bunch of keys twisted to their mark, clanked, and spread against the fifth control, which was the size regulator.

As rapidly as Phobar's captor had spun around, it reversed again, having guessed the trick. A tentacle of pliant metal snaked toward Phobar like a streak of flame.

But in those few seconds a terrific holocaust had taken place. As Phobar's keys spattered against the fifth lever, there came an immediate, growing, strange, high whine, and a sickening collapse of the very surface beneath them. Everywhere outlines of objects wavered, changed, melted, shrank with a steady and nauseatingly swift motion. The roof of the laboratory high overhead plunged downward; the far-distant walls swept inward, contracted. And the metal monsters themselves dwindled as though they were vast rubber figures from which the air was hissing.

Phobar sprang back as the tentacle whipped after him. Only that jump and the suddenly dwarfing dimensions of the giant saved him. And even in that instant of wild action, Phobar shouted aloud—for this whole world was collapsing, together with everything on it, except he himself who came of a different universe and remained unaffected! It was the long shot he had gambled on, the one chance he had to strike a blow.

All over the shrinking laboratory the monsters were rushing toward him. His dwindling captor flung another tentacle toward the control-panel to replace the size-regulating lever. But Phobar had anticipated that possibility and had already leaped to the switchboard, sweeping a heavy bar from its place and crashing it down on the lever so that it could not be replaced without being repaired. Almost in the same move he had bounded away again, the former hundred-foot giant now scarcely more than his own height. But throughout the laboratory, the other metal things had halted in their tasks and were racing onward.

Phobar always remembered that battle in the laboratory as a scene from some horrible nightmare. The catastrophe came so rapidly that he could hardly follow the whirlwind events. The half dozen great leaps he made from the lashing tentacles of his pursuer sufficed to give him a few seconds' respite, and then the weird howling sound of the tortured world swelled to a piercing wail. His lungs were laboring from the violence of his exertions; again and again he barely escaped from the curling whips of metal tentacles. And now the monster was hardly a foot high; the huge condensers and tubes and colossal machinery were like those of a pygmy laboratory. And overhead the roof plunged ever downward.

But Phobar was cornered at last. He stood in the center of a circle of the

foot-high things. His captor suddenly shot forth a dozen rope-like arms toward him as the others closed in. He had not even a weapon, for he had dropped the bar in his first mad bound away from the control-panel. He saw himself trapped in his own trick, for in minutes at most the laboratory would be crushing him with fearful force.

Blindly Phobar reverted to a primitive defense in this moment of infinite danger and kicked with all his strength at the squat monster before him. The thing tried to whirl aside, but Phobar's shoe squashed thickly through and in a disorder of quivering pieces, the metal creature fell, and subsided. Knowing at last that the invaders were vulnerable and how they could be killed, Phobar went leaping and stamping on those nearest him. Under foot, they disintegrated into little pulpy lumps of inert metal.

In a trice he broke beyond the circle and darted to the control-panel. One quick glance showed him that the roof was now scarcely a half dozen yards above. With fingers that fumbled in haste at tiny levers and dials, he spun several of them—the repulsion-ray full—the attraction-ray full. And when they were set, he picked up the bar he had dropped and smashed the controls so that they were helplessly jammed. He could almost feel the planet catapult through the heavens.

The laboratory roof was only a foot over his head. He whirled around, squashed a dozen tiny creeping things, leaped to a disk that was now not more than a few inches broad. Stooping low, balancing himself precariously, he somehow managed to close the tiny switch. A haze of orange light enveloped him, there came a great vertigo and dizziness and pain, he felt himself falling through bottomless spaces . . .

So exhausted that he could scarcely move, Phobar blinked his eyes open to brilliant daylight in the chill of a November Indian summer noon. The sun shone radiant in the heavens; off in the distance he heard a pandemonium of bells and whistles. Wearily he noticed that there were no flamepaths in the sky.

Staggering weakly, he made his way to the observatory, mounted the steps with tired limbs, and wobbled to the eyepiece of his telescope which he had left focused on the dark star two hours before. Almost trembling, he peered through it.

The dark star was gone. Somewhere far out in the abysses of the universe, a runaway world plunged headlong at ever mounting speed to uncharted regions under its double acceleration of attraction and repulsion.

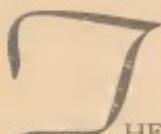
A sigh of contentment came from his lips as he sank into a heavy and profound sleep. Later he would learn of the readjustments in the solar system, and of the colder climate that came to earth, and of the vast changes permanently made by the invading planet, and of a blazing new star discovered in Orion that might signify the birth of a sun or the death of a metallic dark world.

But these were events to be, and he demanded his immediate reward of a day's dreamless slumber.

# *The House of Shadows*

by Mary Elizabeth Counselman

*Here is one of those delightful little stories with which ghost lore abounds—one of those anecdotes, told with a tear in the eye, a touch of pathos, and a stinging little shock at the end.*



THE TRAIN pulled up with a noisy jerk and wheeze, and I peered out into the semi-gloom of dusk at the little depot. What was the place?—"Oak Grove." I could read dimly the sign on the station's roof. I sighed wearily. Three days on the train! Lord, I was tired of the lurching roll, the cinders, the scenery flying past my window! I came to a sudden decision and hurried down the aisle to where the conductor was helping an old lady off.

"How long do we stop here?" I asked him quickly.

"About ten minutes, ma'am," he said, and I stepped from the train to the smooth sand in front of the station. So pleasant to walk on firm ground again! I breathed deeply of the spicy winter air, and strolled to the far side of the station. A brisk little wind was whipping my skirts about my legs and blowing wisps of hair into my eyes. I looked idly about at what I could see of Oak Grove. It was a typical small town—a little sleepier than some, a little prettier than most. I wandered a block or two toward the business district, glancing nervously at my watch from time to time. My ten minutes threatened to be up, when I came upon two dogs trying to tear a small kitten to pieces.

I dived into the fray and rescued the kitten, not without a few bites and scratches in the way of service wounds, and put the little animal inside a store doorway. At that moment a long-drawn, it seemed to me derisive, whistle from my train rent the quiet, and as I tore back toward the station I heard it chugging away. I reached the tracks just in time to see the caboose rattling away into the night.

What should I do? Oh, why had I jumped off at this accursed little station? My luggage, everything I possessed except my purse, was on that vanished train, and here I was, marooned in a village I had never heard of before!

Or had I? "Oak Grove" . . . the name had a familiar ring. Oak Grove

. . . ah! I had it! My roommate at college two years before had lived in a town called Oak Grove. I darted into the depot.

"Does a Miss Mary Allison live here?" I inquired of the station-master. "Mary Deane Allison?"

I wondered at the peculiar unfathomable look the old man gave me, and at his long silence before he answered my question. "Yes'm," he said slowly, with an odd hesitancy that was very noticeable. "You her kin?"

"No," I smiled. "I went to college with her. I . . . I thought perhaps she might put me up for the night. I've . . . well, I was idiot enough to let my train go off and leave me. Do you . . . is she fixed to put up an unexpected guest, do you know?"

"Well"—again that odd hesitancy—"we've a fair to middlin' hotel here," he evaded. "Maybe you'd rather stay there."

I frowned. Perhaps my old friend had incurred the disapproval of Oak Grove by indiscreet behavior—it seems a very easy thing to do in rural towns. I looked at him coldly.

"Perhaps you can direct me to her house," I said stiffly.

He did so, still with that strange reluctance.

I made my way to the big white house at the far end of town, where I was told Mary Allison lived. Vague memories flitted through my mind of my chum as I had seen her last, a vivacious cheerful girl whose home and family life meant more to her than college. I recalled hazy pictures she had given me of her house, of her parents and a brother whose picture had been on our dresser at school. I found myself hurrying forward with eagerness to see her again and meet that doting family of hers.

I found my way at last to the place, a beautiful old Colonial mansion with tall pillars. The grounds were overgrown with shrubbery and weeds, and the enormous white oaks completely screened the great house from the street, giving it an appearance of hiding from the world. The place was sadly in need of repairs and a gardener's care, but it must have been magnificent at one time.

I mounted the steps and rapped with the heavy brass knocker. At my third knock the massive door swung open a little way, and my college friend stood in the aperture, staring at me without a word. I held out my hand, smiling delightedly, and she took it in a slow incredulous grasp. She was unchanged, I noticed—except, perhaps, that her dancing bright-blue eyes had taken on a vague dreamy look. There was an unnatural quiet about her manner, too, which was not noticeable until she spoke. She stood in the doorway, staring at me with those misty blue eyes for a long moment without speech; then she said slowly, with more amazement than I thought natural, "Liz! Liz!" Her fingers tightened about my hand as though she were afraid I might suddenly vanish. "It's . . . it's good to see you! Gosh! How . . . why did you come here?" with a queer embarrassment.

"Well, to tell the truth, my train ran off and left me when I got off for a breath of air," I confessed sheepishly. "But I'm glad now that it did . . . remembered you lived here, so here I am!" She merely stared at me strangely,

still clutching my hand. "There's no train to Atlanta till ten in the morning." I hesitated, then laughed, "Well, aren't you going to ask me in?"

"Why . . . why, of course," Mary said oddly, as if the idea was strange and had not occurred to her. "Come in!"

I stepped into the great hall, wondering at her queer manner. She had been one of my best friends at college, so why this odd constraint? Not quite as if she did not want me around—more as if it were queer that I should wish to enter her house, as if I were a total stranger, a creature from another planet! I tried to attribute it to the unexpectedness of my visit; yet inwardly I felt this explanation was not sufficient.

"What a beautiful old place!" I exclaimed, with an effort to put her at ease again. Then, as the complete silence of the place struck me, unthinkingly I added, "You don't live here alone, do you?"

She gave me the oddest look, one I could not fathom, and replied so softly that I could hardly catch the words, "Oh, no."

I laughed. "Of course! I'm crazy . . . but where is everybody?"

I took off my hat, looking about me at the Colonial furniture and the large candelabra on the walls with the clusters of lighted candles which gave the only light in the place—for there were no modern lighting fixtures of any kind, I noted. The dim candle-light threw deep shadows about the hall—shadows that flickered and moved, that seemed alive. It should have given me a sense of nervous fear; yet somehow there was peace, contentment, warmth about the old mansion. Yet, too, there was an incongruous air of mystery, of unseen things in the shadowy corners, of being watched by unseen eyes.

"Where is everybody? Gone to bed?" I repeated, as she seemed not to have heard my question.

"Here they are," Mary answered in that strange hushed voice I had noticed, as if some one were asleep whom she might waken.

I looked in the direction she indicated, and started slightly. I had not seen that little group when I entered! They were standing scarcely ten feet from me just beyond the aura of light from the candle, and they stared at me silently, huddled together and motionless.

I smiled and glanced at Mary, who said in a soft voice like the murmur of a light wind, "My mother . . ."

I stopped forward and held out my hand to the tall kind-faced woman who advanced a few steps from the half-seen group in the shadows. She seemed, without offense, not to see my hand, but merely gave me a beautiful smile and said, in that same hushed voice Mary used, "If you are my daughter's friend, you are welcome!"

I happened to glance at Mary from the corner of my eye as she spoke, and I saw my friend's unnatural constraint vanish, give place to a look, I thought wonderingly, that was unmistakably one of relief.

"My father," Mary's voice had a peculiar tone of happiness. A tall distinguished-looking man of about fifty stepped toward me, smiling gently. He too seemed not to see my outthrust hand, but said in a quiet friendly voice, "I am glad to know you, my dear. Mary has spoken of you often."

I made some friendly answer to the old couple; then Mary said, "This is Lonny . . . remember his picture?"

The handsome young man whose photograph I remembered stepped forward, grinning engagingly.

"So this is Liz!" he said. "Always wanted to meet one girl who isn't afraid of a mouse . . . remember? Mary told us about the time you put one in the prof's desk." He too spoke in that near-whisper that went oddly with his cheery words, and I found myself unconsciously lowering my voice to match theirs. They were unusually quiet for such a merry friendly group, and I was especially puzzled at Mary's hushed voice and manner—she had always been a boisterous tomboy sort of person.

"This is Betty," Mary spoke again, a strange glow lighting her face.

A small girl about twelve stepped solemnly from the shadows and gave me a grave old-fashioned curtsey.

"And Bill," said Mary, as a chubby child peeped out at me from behind his sister's dress and broke into a soft gurgling laugh.

"What darling kids!" I burst out.

The baby toddled out from behind Betty and stood looking at me with big blue eyes, head on one side. I stepped forward to pat the curly head, but as I put out a hand to touch him, he seemed to draw away easily just out of reach. I could not feel rebuffed, however, with his bright eyes telling me plainly that I was liked. It was just a baby's natural shyness with strangers, I told myself, and made no other attempt to catch him.

After a moment's conversation, during which my liking for this charming family grew, Mary asked if I should like to go to my room and freshen up a bit before dinner. As I followed her up the stairs, it struck me forcibly—as it had before only vaguely—that this family, with the exception of Mary, were in very bad health. From father to baby, they were most pasty-white of complexion—not sallow, I mused, but a sort of translucent white like the glazed-glass doors of private offices. I attributed it to the uncertain light of the candles that they looked rather smoky, like figures in a movie when the film has become old and faded.

"Dinner at six," Mary told me, smiling, and left me to remove the travel-stains.

I came downstairs a little before the dinner hour, to find the hall deserted—and, woman-like, I stopped to parade before a large cheval-glass in the wall. It was a huge mirror, reflecting the whole hall behind me, mellowly illumined in the glow of the candles. Turning about for a back-view of myself, I saw the little baby, Bill, standing just beside me, big eyes twinkling merrily.

"Hello there, old fellow," I smiled at him. "Do I look all right?" I glanced back at the mirror . . . and what it reflected gave me a shock.

I could see myself clearly in the big glass, and most of the hall far behind me, stretching back into the shadows. But the baby was not reflected in the glass at all! I moved, with a little chill, just behind him . . . and I could see my own reflection clearly, but it was as if he was simply not there.

At that moment Mary called us to dinner, and I promptly forgot the dis-

turbing optical illusion with the parting resolve to have my eyes examined. I held out my hand to lead little Bill into the dining-room, but he dodged by me with a mischievous gurgle of laughter, and toddled into the room ahead of me.

That was the pleasantest meal I can remember. The food was excellent and the conversation cheery and light, though I had to strain to catch words spoken at the far end of the table, as they still spoke in that queer hushed tone. My voice, breaking into the murmur of theirs, sounded loud and discordant, though I have a real Southern voice.

Mary served the dinner, hopping up and running back into the kitchen from time to time to fetch things. By this I gathered that they were in rather straitened circumstances and could not afford a servant. I chattered gayly to Lonny and Mary, while the baby and Betty listened with obvious delight and Mary's parents put in a word occasionally when they could break into our chatter.

It was a merry informal dinner, not unusual except that the conversation was carried on in that near-whisper. I noticed vaguely that Mary and I were the only ones who ate anything at all. The others merely toyed with their food, cutting it up ready for eating but not tasting a bite, though several times they would raise a fork to their lips and put it down again, as though pretending to eat. Even the baby only splashed with his little fork in his rice and kept his eyes fixed on me, now and then breaking into that merry gurgling laugh.

We wandered into the library after the meal, where Mary and I chatted of old times. Mr. Allison and his wife read or gave ear to our prattling from time to time, smiling and winking at each other. Lonny, with the baby in his lap and Betty perched on the arm of his chair, laughed with us at some foolish tale of our freshman days.

At about eleven Mary caught me yawning covertly, and hustled me off to bed. I obediently retired, thankful for a bed that did not roll me from side to side all night, and crawled in bed in borrowed pajamas with a book, to read myself to sleep by the flickering candle on my bedside table.

I must have dropped off to sleep suddenly, for I awoke to find my candle still burning. I was about to blow it out and go back to sleep when a slight sound startled the last trace of drowsiness from me.

It was the gentle rattle of my doorknob being turned very quietly.

An impulse made me feign sleep, though my eyes were not quite closed and I watched the door through my eyelashes. It swung open slowly, and Mrs. Allison came into the room. She walked with absolute noiselessness up to my bed, and stood looking down at me intently. I shut my eyes tightly so my eyelids would not flutter, and when I opened them slightly in a moment, she was moving toward the door, apparently satisfied that I was fast asleep. I thought she was going out again, but she paused at the door and beckoned to some one outside in the hall.

Slowly and with incredible lack of sound, there tiptoed into my room Mr. Allison, Lonny, Betty, and the baby. They stood beside the bed looking down at me with such tender expressions that I was touched.

I conquered an impulse to open my eyes and ask them what they meant by this late visit, deciding to wait and watch. It did not occur to me to be frightened at this midnight intrusion. There swept over me instead a sense of unutterable peace and safety, a feeling of being watched over and guarded by some benevolent angel.

They stood for a long moment without speaking, and then the little girl, bending close to me, gently caressed my hand, which was lying on the coverlet. I controlled a start with great effort.

Her little hand was icy cold—not with the coldness of hands, but with a peculiar *windy* coldness. It was as if some one had merely blown a breath of icy air on me, for though her hand rested a moment on mine, it had no weight!

Then, still without speaking but with gentle affectionate smiles on all their faces, they tiptoed out in single file. Wondering at their actions, I dropped off at last into a serene sleep.

Mary brought my breakfast to my bed next morning, and sat chattering with me while I ate. I dressed leisurely and made ready to catch my ten o'clock train. When the time drew near, I asked Mary where her family was—they were nowhere in the house and I had seen none of them since the night before. I reiterated how charming they were, and how happy my visit had been. That little glow of happiness lighted my friend's face again, but at my next words it vanished into one that was certainly frightened pleading. I had merely asked to tell them good-bye.

That odd unfathomable expression flitted across her face once more. "They . . . they're gone," she said in a strained whisper. And as I stared at her perplexedly, she added in confusion, "I . . . I mean, they're away. They won't be back until . . . nightfall," the last word was so low it was almost unintelligible.

So I told her to give them my thanks and farewells. She did not seem to want to accompany me to the train, so I went alone. My train was late, and I wandered to the ticket window and chatted with the station-master.

"Miss Allison has a charming family, hasn't she?" I began conversationally. "They seem so devoted to each other."

Then I saw the station-master was staring at me as if I had suddenly gone mad. His wrinkled face had gone very pale.

"You stayed there last night?" His voice was almost a croak.

"Why yes!" I replied, wondering at his behavior. "I did. Why not?"

"And . . . you saw . . . them?" his voice sank to a whisper.

"You mean Mary's family?" I asked, becoming a little annoyed at his foolish perturbation. "Certainly I saw them! What's so strange about that? What's wrong with them?"

My approaching train wailed in the distance, but I lingered to hear his reply. It came with that same reluctance, that same hesitancy, after a long moment.

"They died last year," he whispered, leaning forward toward me and fixing me with wide intent eyes. "Wiped out—every one of 'em exceptin' Mary—by smallpox."

# *The Ship of Silence*

by Albert Richard Wetjen

*We needn't tell you of the mystery of the Mary Celeste, because Albert Richard Wetjen tells you about it and its companion vessels in the story of "The Ship of Silence." Suffice to say that the ocean is a place of many mysteries, that men who sail above the unplumbed depths are known for their unwillingness to scoff at superstitions and hints of the inexplicable, and that perhaps they have good reason to keep open minds on such subjects.*

B

ECAUSE this is a true story, there is no ending. . . . It was early in the night and very hot, the sticky tropical darkness pressing all about us, seeming to muffle the lights of the city ashore and rendering to a soft velvet the waters of the harbor as they rippled through the anchor chains and along the hull of the little coffee freighter that had brought me to Santos, Brazil. I had been sitting with Captain Massey and old Billings under the awning of the after-deck, drinking long, cold gin *tonicas* and talking of the sea in general and of ships that had vanished into its mysterious immensity. Old Billings never romanced, let it be said. He was a dignified man, red of face and with silvery hair, in his eightieth year and at that time the Lloyds surveyor and agent at Santos. He had followed the sea for some forty years before leaving it to take his present position, and so he spoke as a sailor.

"It's not so hard perhaps to account for the foundering of most ships," he said. "They get into bad weather and have their hatches burst in; or they're built or loaded top-heavy and capsize. That's all in the run of the game. What isn't so easy to explain is how they can sometimes drop out of sight without leaving a trace, especially in these days of wireless and with the regular sea-lanes all well traveled. But we know they do. And we know too that it's hard to sink a vessel without something floating clear—a boat, lifebuoys, hatches, oars and what-not. Of course the sea's big and it's not hard to believe that searching vessels can overlook such small things. You've only a visibility of from ten to fifteen miles on the clearest of days from a ship's deck, and hatches and lifebuoys and even bodies are level with the water, easily hidden behind the swells."

"Yet even at that it seems curious that nothing comes to light. Take the *Waratah* now. You'll remember her—a modern liner of over fifteen thousand tons, newly built and on her second voyage. Carrying over two hundred souls, what with passengers and crew, and running on a regular route, down the coast from Durban to Capetown in South Africa. Of course she carried no wireless. That was before the day it became compulsory for liners to carry it, and it hadn't come into general use."

"But there she was, on a thickly traveled run. Soon after leaving Durban she speaks to the freighter *Clan McIntyre*; drops her astern and then proceeds to disappear. Of course there was a heavy gale reported soon after and it seems reasonable to suppose she foundered. But a new ship, remember—absolutely vanished! They sent out searching vessels, of course, when she was reported overdue. For months Government and private craft patrolled the coast waters. One vessel searched for over ninety days and covered close to twenty thousand miles of sea, and there was even a vessel sent to follow the normal current-drift far to the south. But nothing was ever found. Not a body, not a hatch, not a plank!

"Then there was that American transport the *Cyclops* that dropped out of sight—and she *did* have wireless. Then only this year there was that Danish training-ship the *Kobenhaven*, clearing from Buenos Aires for Australia. Been overdue for months and nothing found; must have gone down—and she's taken the flower of Danish youth with her, sons of the best families. My personal opinion is that she got too far southerly, into the Antarctic ice, struck a berg and crumpled. You know.

"But that isn't really what I started out to tell you. You can set up some sort of reasonable explanation for ships that just vanish. It's the other vessels that make the real mystery—the ships that don't drop out of sight, but turn up like a lot of wandering ghosts, sound above and below but without a soul on board. In '23 or '24, I forget which, there was a schooner picked up off Diamond Shoals, to the north. Sails set, boats in place, no unreasonable amount of water below. But never a sign of her men. . . . *Why?* Foundering doesn't cover that—for there's the ship!

"Somewhere in the records too you'll find notice of a Japanese steamer discovered drifting in the South Atlantic. Carried a crew of forty-odd and all they found were eight dead men on the main deck, and nothing to show how they had died. Boats all in place there too. No sign of heavy weather. No sign of fire or disease. . . . Queer, isn't it? And then of course there was the *Mary Celeste* in the '70's; I suppose she's the classic of what I am trying to say.

"They found her in mid-Atlantic in calm weather, you'll remember, with all the usual signs of mystery. Everything in order. Hull and spars sound. Fair-weather sails set; not a lifeboat missing. Everything as it should be, except she had no crew. What makes her case a classic are the number of altogether peculiar features.

"There were the men's clothes hung on a line to dry. Breakfast, half eaten, was on the fo'c'sle and the main cabin tables; and the food was still good, proving she had not long been abandoned. Under the needle of a sewing-machine in the Captain's room was a child's dress, half-finished, where the Captain's wife had obviously hurriedly left it. Then they found a cutlass in its scabbard, with stains like blood on the blade, and on the rail in the starboard bow they found a deep new cut with stains about it also. Cut into the bow itself, a little above the water-line, were two deep grooves, gouged out each side, as it were, and quite fresh. Most curious of all, the only thing missing on board was the chronometer. But again—why? . . . *Why?*

"Where had everyone gone? There was no sign of mutiny or of a raid, shall we say, by pirates. How had the men left the ship—and why had they left, it, obviously in haste, in the middle of breakfast? We don't know. There have been a lot of theories put forward, but for one reason or another they can be discounted. If it were only the *Mary Celeste* we might let the matter go, just write it off. But there are all those other ships, not only those that drop out of sight, without trace, but those that are found, abandoned for no earthly reason. New cases still turn up too, once every decade or so—and there you are.

"I think I'm a hard-headed man. I've had lot of experience one way and the other. I don't take much stock in ghosts and I believe everything has a reasonable explanation if we could locate what it is. And yet sometimes—well, I don't know. The sea is pretty big and we haven't learned much about it and what's in it. Remember the land only covers one-fifth, or is it a quarter, of the earth's surface—and we haven't fully explored the land yet. As for the sea, we have only gone down a few hundred feet—a few hundred feet in five miles of depth, remember. Ships stick to narrow and clearly defined lanes as a rule. There are tremendous areas where I suppose vessels only wander once in fifty years, or perhaps never go into at all and never have been.

"Is it something in the sea that comes out and loots these abandoned ships of their men? I know and you know that there are queer things in the sea. There're the giant squids on which the sperm whales feed; I've heard they sometimes are a hundred feet from the tip of one arm to the other. Then there's the sea-serpent. Yes, I know landsmen laugh at us for believing in that. But why shouldn't we believe in it? It's been known from ancient times. It's been seen more than once, even if we acknowledge that a length of kelp, a barnacle-covered log or a school of porpoises in line might often have been mistaken for it. But how can you argue away the report of the *Daedalus*?

"Here is a British warship, certainly in command of a reliable man, certainly officered by some few gentlemen whose integrity cannot be questioned. They sight a long snakelike animal, observe it for some time and are even able to sketch it. The scientists and public may laugh, but you can't argue away the testimony of a whole ship's crew. Nor is it only the crew of the *Daedalus* you have to figure on. Captain Hope of another British war vessel, the *Fly*, saw a large animal with the body of a crocodile, a long neck and four paddlelike arms, in the Gulf of California. A Lieutenant Hayne, in command of the yacht *Osborne*, sighted something as queer, but I forget where. There are two other men who filed a joint report also, and they were members of the Zoölogical Society cruising in a yacht off the coast of Brazil. They saw a creature with a neck seven or eight feet long alone and as thick around as a man's body. I say you can't laugh away all this, and you can read the full accounts yourself if you doubt me. I've gone into the matter pretty thoroughly because—well, you'll understand in a minute.

"I don't say, mind, that any sort of animal such as the giant squid or the sea-serpent can account for these mysterious and deserted ships, nor for the

actual complete disappearances. I don't know. No one knows, and we can only wonder. I do hear that some scientists have recently suggested the survival in deep waters of some of those gigantic animals that occupied the world in ancient times, before man came. It doesn't seem unreasonable to me.

"But we'll let that pass. What I wanted to tell you when I started out was of an experience that came to me. I shall never forget it. No man could. It was one of those nightmarish things that remain with a man all his life, and I suppose everyone goes through something as ghastly at least once before he dies, if he follows the sea. . . . Yes, I'll take another drink!"

"It all happened a long time ago. I was just a young third mate then, around twenty, serving my first voyage as an officer on the bark *Doyon* out of Sydney for Callao. We had good sailing weather, as I remember, and we were coming up to the South American coast after a couple of weeks out, when we sighted just such a ship as I have been talking of.

"I don't want to exaggerate or to imagine things after all these years, but I'll swear there was something eerie about her from the moment we first saw her. It was early in the morning, as I recall, and I had just come up from breakfast to take over from the mate—a decent sort of chap named Mathews, tall and well-built, not many years older than I was myself but very highly strung, as I afterwards discovered.

"That's a queer-looking packet ahead of us," he remarked when I joined him on the poop. He had been staring through the glasses and now he handed them to me. "Looks like she's not under control," he said. I stared through the glasses myself and saw a small barkentine some distance ahead of us and apparently crossing our bow. She was under plain sail but her after-booms were jarring crazily and it was obvious that she was yawning all over the sea. I could discover no sign of life on her decks, nor could I locate anyone at her wheel and I suggested to Mathews that he'd better call the skipper.

"I've sent for him," he observed and so we both continued to inspect the strange ship until the skipper came on deck. The morning was very calm, with a gentle wind from the south. There was no sea, just a long oily swell almost a bottle-green in color, and the sky was a clear blue dotted with a few clouds on the weather horizon. It was warm, too, but I remember I felt uneasy and a little chilled, just as if I had a presentiment of what was to come. The skipper came on the poop rubbing his eyes, for he always slept late, and he took the glasses from the mate with considerable impatience.

"What is it now?" he said bad-temperedly, and he stared through the glasses for some time. Then he said, "By George, it looks like she's abandoned!" and I knew from the sound of his voice he was feeling pleased, thinking of the salvage.

"Well, to cut a long story short, we hove the *Doyon* to and the skipper sent the mate and myself away in our longboat, together with four of the men. We came up under the barkentine's counter and read her name, painted in white letters, '*Robert Sutter—SAN FRANCISCO*', and it didn't need a second look to tell she was abandoned all right. One of the men got aboard over her midship rail when she rolled down, and he threw us a line so the rest of us could swing up. We left two men in the boat and proceeded to inspect

our prize, telling the two men who had boarded with us to look over the fo'c'stle while Mathews and myself went aft.

"It is a curious thing—but I swear I had gooseflesh all over from the first moment I put foot on the *Robert Sutter's* main deck. There was something so lonely about her, so—how shall I say?—*uncanny!* You could feel by the swing of her she was not water-logged. There was no sign of fire that a first casual inspection brought to light, and she was clean and had evidently been newly painted. Every rope and line was in place and her two boats were secure in their chocks on top of the galley house. We searched her from stem to stern and found no hint of life, save that in a large iron cage, suspended from a hook outside the galley 'midships, there was a parrot.

"The bird seemed in a bad way. It was crouched down on the bottom of the cage, lying half on its side and sort of pulsing all over, its eyes glazed and half closed. From the look of it—it was all but bald—it was a very old bird and it made no move when we approached it. 'It needs some water,' said Mathews, a fact which was obvious, and after we had brought it water, which it eagerly dragged itself up to, we went on with our search.

"Near the break of the poop, on the starboard side, we discovered what must have once been a cat. The creature had been smashed flat—as flat as a pancake, I tell you! It was just a thin sheet of black fur and dried flesh, literally sticking to the planking. But there was nothing to show how it had been killed, and at the time we did not pause to ask ourselves about it. We had to complete our searching and get back to the *Doyon* to make our report, you understand.

"Well, in the scuppers right opposite the port galley door we found a revolver, a bright nickel affair somewhat rusted and with every shell fired. And that was all, except that over the whole vessel there hovered a curious sort of smell, dried-up, if you know what I mean, like the stale, weedy, fishy smell you get from mud-flats when the tide runs out. But even that we didn't particularly notice at the time.

"Anyway, that was all, as I said. The ship's cargo was cut lumber, which we ascertained by lifting the hatches, and when we sounded the well we found only the usual amount of bilge water which every healthy wooden ship will take through her seams. It was all very mysterious, though, and if you can picture us staggering about the swaying deck with the spars jarring above us, the canvas thundering and slatting, the wheel and rudder creaking, every block and line making its own individual noise, and not a soul to be found, you can understand how we felt. Mathews was getting the jumps even before we were through with the inspection and I noticed he wiped the sweat from his face repeatedly.

"We went back to the *Doyon* at last and made our report, and the skipper didn't take much stock in what we had to say. 'She must have had a third boat,' he observed carelessly. 'They probably thought she was foundering or something and just left her. I've known whole crews to panic before. You say there's no sign of disease, and no bodies? Well, there's nothing to be afraid of, then?' He did admit it was queer that we had found her hull sound and that none of her navigation instruments appeared to be missing. Even in

a panic the master and the officers of a vessel are not liable to forget their working-tools. And then in the log-book we'd discovered and brought back there was no hint of anything amiss. It was written up to within four days previously and reported only fair weather. I remember I pointed out to the skipper that no crew would be likely to abandon a vessel and leave the log-book and ship's papers behind, but he brushed all that aside. He was a man almost completely without imagination, and all he could think of was salvage.

"I'll give you six men," he said to Mathews, "and you can take the third mate along with you. Bring her to Callao and we can go into the whole matter there with the port officials."

"Mathews wasn't a bit pleased with the prospect, though most mates would have jumped at the opportunity of making themselves a nest-egg and enjoying a first command, even if it would be only for a short time. 'I don't like the idea at all, sir,' he said. 'There's something queer about the whole business!'

"The skipper waved all that away. 'Nonsense!' he said. 'You ought to thank your stars for the chance!' But then, you see, he hadn't been on board the *Robert Sutter*, and we had to admit—now we were back on the *Doyon*, surrounded by the curious crew—that our feelings did seem rather silly. So the long and short of it was we picked out six men, or rather the skipper appointed the six most useless we had on board, and we pulled back to the deserted barkentine, four other men coming with us in the longboat to take it back. The *Doyon* squared away on her course again and I can remember that Mathews and I stood on the *Robert Sutter's* poop and watched her with something of the feeling of being deserted to our fate.

"There wasn't any use of our worrying about that, however. There we were with a perfectly sound and well-built ship, amply provided with water and provisions, rolling at will on a bottle-green sea and with a fair wind blowing for Callao. Mathews pulled himself together and we got the vessel on a course, set watches, wound up the rundown chronometers, setting them from a spare one we had brought from the *Doyon*, and so prepared to make port.

"It was somewhat uncanny to clear out two of the cabins below ready for our occupancy, for the gear of the previous inhabitants was scattered about, and in the room I chose, which had been the mate's, there was even the imprint of his head still on the pillow and a half-whittled plug of chewing-tobacco tossed on the blankets, together with an open clasp-knife. I shook off my feelings however, before very long. I was young, healthy, usually in good spirits and it was not long before I was whistling to myself. Mathews came and stood in the doorway while I was fixing my bunk and his face was very serious, more serious than I had ever seen it. I think I have said he was a highly strung man.

"I don't see how the devil you can whistle!" he burst out irritably. "Good God, man, doesn't it bother you? The crew—fourteen men, according to the articles—all gone!"

"I stopped whistling and looked at him. 'It is queer,' I agreed. 'But it doesn't do us any good to worry about it.'

"Mathews shivered and looked over his shoulder. 'But where did they

go?' he said, his voice dropping. '*Where and why?* It's all right for the skipper to talk of a third boat, but this ship carried no third boat. I've been over her again. There isn't a sign of one.' He went away and I could hear him muttering to himself as he straightened up the room that had been the Captain's.

"A fine sort of business, wasn't it? Yet we could have probably carried on all right and accepted things as we found them, if it hadn't been for Mathews and—something else. When I went on deck I found Mathews staring down at the splotch of black fur and dried flesh that must have once been a cat.

"'You can figure it out,' he told me in a strained voice. 'That poor little devil was running away from something and then it was killed. Think how fast it must have been, whatever it was killed it. You know how a frightened cat can run.'

"'What makes you think it was frightened?' I asked him. But he only shook his head. Since that time I have seen a python smash flat a running dog with a blow of its snout—and that was quick work. Yet a dog isn't as agile as a cat. You see what I mean? And that python's snout only caught the dog in the small of the back. This, that was stuck to the deck, was *all* flattened, head, body and tail, and all about it there was a faint but perceptible depression in the hard teak planking, a sort of circle about four feet across.

"'Then there's this gun,' said Mathews later on, coming back to the subject. He held in his hand the nickel-plated revolver we had found in the scuppers. 'Every shot fired. What at? Why?'

"I tried to talk him out of his somber mood, but each time I did so he would only shake his head and ask further questions—until I swear he had the whole crew of us completely jumpy when we might easily have forgotten the matter, or at least relegated it to the back of our minds. . . . Until, of course, the next thing occurred.

"This was late that same afternoon, or rather close to evening. The men had gone for'ard, all except the helmsman, of course, and Mathews and I were pacing up and down the poop waiting for the seaman we had delegated as cook, to serve supper. The day was still fair, the sea calm and smooth. We were under full sail and making about six knots before a freshening wind which was coming up with the approach of nightfall. And then, all of a sudden, there came the most terrible scream and quite distinctly some one shouted, '*My God, Collins!*'

"I can't describe the electrifying effect of the thing. That scream sent all our spines cold, froze the very blood in our veins. And that voice! There was everything in it that told of utter terror. More than that, it was a strange voice—it belonged to no one of the men we had with us.

"Mathews and I had stopped pacing the poop and were riveted to the planking. 'Good heavens!' said Mathews in a strained voice at last. 'What—who was that?'

"Before I could even venture a reply there came a whole series of screams, splitting our very ear-drums. And then we heard another voice, a different voice from the first: '*It's coming aft. It's coming aft!*' And if ever there was sheer, pitiful and desperate horror in any man's tones there was in these. The

crew had come running up from the fo'c'stle. The cook had come out his galley and was standing open-mouthed, looking dazedly around, one hand clutching his apron and the other holding a cleaver.

"Mathews let out an oath and dropped down the poop companion to the main deck. He was badly shaken, and he ran 'midships toward the men. I was close behind him too!

"'Who the hell's making that racket?' he shouted hysterically.

"No one answered him. The men had stopped and were looking uneasily about. Again came those awful screams, ringing all over the ship, and the strange voice thick and hoarse with utter fear: '*It's coming aft! It's coming aft!*'

"Mathews stopped short and stared about him. 'My God!' he whispered to me. 'Am I going mad?' And then we both saw the men were pointing at something and after a moment the cook exclaimed in a relieved voice, 'Why, it's only the parrot, sir!'

"I can remember the vast flood of relief that came over me. I stopped shaking and let out a big sigh, and I could see that Mathews visibly relaxed. 'I'd forgotten the parrot,' he said with a queer laugh, and he walked round to the forepart of the galley where the bird's cage hung. The men gathered about too and some of them laughed, though there was nothing of mirth in the sound and not much of reassurance. Mathews looked into the cage and I peered over his shoulder. Since we had given the bird some water that morning it had apparently recovered, for now it was sitting on its swing perch—but sort of crouched down. And I tell you it acted like no parrot I have ever seen, before or since.

"Every one of its tattered remaining feathers was erect. Its eyes were fixed and staring and did not blink. It shivered the whole length of its body at regular intervals and did not move when Mathews shoved a tentative finger through the bars and spoke to it in a soothing voice. Even as we watched it the bird crouched lower, opened its beak and gave vent to one of those horrible screams. And this time it was the sound of a man in awful pain, wave on wave, abruptly cut off. There was an aching silence for a second and then the parrot croaked distinctly, with a queer tremulous catch in its voice: '*You can't shoot it! You can't shoot a thing like that!*' And the voice was again strange, the third we had heard, distinct in *timbre* and pitch. The voices of three separate men!

"I can remember that for at least a minute there was a tense and frozen silence. I could hear my heart thumping and the cold sweat was running down my throat. Mathews had pulled his finger back from the cage as if it burned him and he was the first to speak. 'I never thought of it,' he said, his words flat and strangely without expression. 'I never thought of it, but it's simple enough. . . . He knows what it's all about! He knows what happened. He *saw!*' He spoke like a man half asleep, staring wide-eyed and ashen-faced at the crouching, shivering parrot. The men began to stir uneasily and one or two of them looked hastily over their shoulders.

"I nudged Mathews in the back. 'Pull yourself together,' I whispered. 'We can't have the men getting all jumpy.'

"But you couldn't get him away. You couldn't get the men away either; they all seemed riveted to the spot, watching that poor devil of a parrot. It mumbled to itself nearly all the time. Then it would chatter out some words we could not understand—not English words. Nor did it always use the same language. Mathews had a little command of Spanish and swore the bird often talked in that tongue. I am certain I caught German words and once or twice certain phrases in Polynesian which I'd picked up while on a trading-schooner through the Islands.

"You understand that the parrot was certainly old, incredibly old, I would say. It was almost featherless; it must have had many masters in its time. You know they say those birds live for a century or longer. And God knows where this bird had been and what it had seen. The things it muttered must have come from its ancient memory of many masters of many nationalities. And between its mutters it would let out those awful screams, exquisitely different screams—the screams of different men in agony and terror. And immediately after each scream it would choke out some phrase, not always in English, as I've said, but in other languages too.

"I don't know if a bird can go insane, but if one can that parrot was very close to it. There was only one thing we could deduce from its actions. It had been frightened almost out of its life, and the screams it gave and the words it shouted had been hammered into its head by some awful happening. The words it muttered half-mechanically were from long ago; the words it shouted were of recent memorizing. It was horrifying. It seemed trying to tell us something. From behind its fixed, unwinking eyes there seemed to hover a shadow; I even felt there was an uncanny flicker of pleading. It wanted to make us understand that it had seen something no living thing had seen before, something so monstrous and ghastly it had penetrated at once and indelibly even into its own cynical and calloused brain.

"How long we all remained about that cage, silent and shuddering, I do not know. But it was the night chill coming into the wind that roused us, that and the smell of the supper burning on the galley stove. We had all insensibly crowded together, as if each man feared to stand alone. The man at the wheel began to shout, his voice frightened. He wanted to know what was the matter and he wanted to be relieved. I told one of the other men to go aft and he went, but only with the greatest reluctance, his hand on the haft of his sheath-knife and his head continually turning to glance over his shoulder or at the darkening sea. And still at irregular intervals that crazy parrot let out its blood-curdling screams and shouted blindly at us: '*It's coming aft. It's coming aft!*' or that desperate, '*My God, Collins!*' or that flat, despairing, '*You can't shoot it. You can't shoot a thing like that!*'

"I shook Mathews finally and told him we ought to be getting back to the poop. We hadn't eaten yet, and it was getting dark. 'Eaten?' he said, literally staggering as he went aft with me. 'Eaten? How can you talk of eating?' He stumbled up on the poop and leaned against the main cabin skylight, mopping his wet forehead. 'What was it that came aft?' He whispered hard, shivered and tried to straighten himself. 'The mate of this ship, was named Collins, according to the articles we found,' he said. 'And only

the Captain would be likely to call him Collins. So it was the Captain who called out, "My, God Collins!" And what was it that came aft?

"You're acting like a damned fool!" I told him bluntly, though I was all but unnerved myself. You would have been too, to hear those terrible screams ringing through the ship every minute or so, and those strange voices of vanished men repeating those terror-stricken words! But I still had enough sense to face the fact it was only a parrot talking and that we had to get the *Robert Sutter* into port. I got Mathews below at last and we had a stiff drink together, after which we ate some canned beef and sea biscuit, the supper that had been preparing in the galley being hopelessly ruined. We knew for certain now there had been no third boat!

"Well, that night we faced another complication, for none of the men would remain for'ard, but insisted on bringing their mattresses aft and crouching down by the break of the poop. The helmsmen refused to be left alone and we had to let two men steer through the dark hours. Neither Mathews nor myself could sleep, with those screams ringing out, and we paced the night away together. It was uncanny to be on deck. We all had the feeling that at any moment something would loom up out of the sea and come toward us.

"You'd have thought that parrot would have grown tired, or that its throat would have worn out. But it never ceased its clamor. Hour after hour there was that terrible screaming, exquisitely depicting everything that vanished crew must have suffered in that last hour or those last minutes. And between the screaming, the voices and words of dead men shouted across the noises of the flying ship! Can you wonder we all had the same terrors a child has in the dark, a darkness it peoples with dragons and burning-eyed bogies? I have always considered myself a moderately courageous man, but I tell you that on the *Robert Sutter* I really knew fear, the sort of utter fear that gets you by the throat and turns your stomach and knees to water.

"As for Mathews, he was half insane, and he kept going below for a drink until he finally brought the bottle on deck with him. 'We ought to kill the damned thing!' he kept saying over and over. 'We ought to kill it!' But no one would go 'midships and kill it. I would not have gone 'midships myself that night for all the money in the world. And by the time the dawn came the sheer panic of the night had subsided enough to give Mathews some element of reason. Perhaps it was the whisky he had consumed, but he certainly evidenced more control with the coming of the tropical sun all red and gold along the horizon. And still, remember, that parrot was screaming and shouting, with never a let-up! I would never have thought any creature could survive such exhaustion as must have sapped its body.

"No, you're right, we can't kill the damned thing," Mathews agreed after we'd talked it over. "It's the only clue we have. We've got to turn it over to the authorities and let them see what they can make of it." He swore thickly to himself. "But I'll go mad if it doesn't stop!" He plugged up his ears with some oakum, but he did not seem able to shut out the noise. He looked exhausted, drained out by the light of dawn. I think we were all drained out and I gave the men a tot of whisky apiece and made them go for'ard.

"We tried every means to make that confounded parrot shut up. We covered its cage with a cloth, which only seemed to drive it into new frenzies; and we tried lowering it in the hold on top of the cargo, but that had an even worse effect. It would not eat but occasionally would dip its beak in water. And nearly all the time, pulsing and rising and falling, the ship was wracked with screaming and the voices of those dead men. Mathews went below, half drunk and with a false bravado at last, and with his ears still stuffed up he managed to fall asleep. With the coming of full morning and the continued repetition of that parrot's noise I recovered some of my nerve.

"I drew some comfort from the fact that we were fully a hundred miles from the spot where we had picked up the *Robert Sutter*, and whatever it was that had made her a crewless derelict, was far away. I went 'midships, shuddering, to listen to the bird with the same morbidness that draws you to the scene of a murderer's crime, and tried to count the different remarks it kept making. There were, as I have said, only three in English but there were several in frenzied Spanish and one of the seamen who had been on German vessels assured me there were at least a dozen words shouted in that tongue. I thought I caught snatches of French too, but I was not sure. I am speaking now only of those words obviously registered on the bird's memory in that time of recent horror.

"I got hold of a copy of the ship's original articles and discovered that to judge from the names she must have carried a mixed crew all right, as most vessels do. There had been a cook named José Alvarez, obviously Spanish. There had been two men with Teutonic names, and one with a French-sounding name. I judged the officers had been Americans and it seemed reasonable to suppose that each man, in the moment of stress, would have reverted to his native tongue.

"The more I thought of the matter, under the comforting bright sun of day, the more I began to see the possibilities, and to grow curious. Somewhere in all that jargon the mad parrot kept giving forth there must be a clue, must be some word that would tell what it was that had come aft. It was not unreasonable to suppose that while the men were running madly about the deck some one of them must have shouted out a word, a sentence or a fragment giving a hint as to its appearance. And if that were so such a sentence or fragment might have registered on the quivering parrot's brain to be eventually spewed forth. I thought to myself: 'If once we get that damned bird to Callao alive there'll be linguists to take down everything it's shouting out. Then we might know!'

"You see, it really was intriguing, apart from all the terror and horror those racking words and screams provided—coming, as it were, out of nothing. We were on the track of a genuine mystery. We might have in our grasp the clue that would account for those other ships that had been found as we'd found the *Robert Sutter*. We might even be able to understand why ships had totally disappeared, without trace. We might catch a glimpse of Something that should have died in the youth of the world. The parrot knew! Why had those men vanished? What was it that had come on them out of the calm sea, sending them into stark convulsive terror, causing one of them,

undoubtedly the Captain, to empty a nickel-plated revolver at Something which someone else had declared you could not shoot? The parrot knew—and it was trying to tell us.

"Mathews came on deck soon after noon, quite drunk, his whole body shaking and his eyes burning in his face. The parrot had not fallen silent at all, and it kept up its incredible screaming and shouting all through the day. I could hear Mathews grinding his teeth together as he paced up and down, his fingers twitching, and he kept saying to himself, 'If it would only shut up until we get to port! If it would only shut up!' But it didn't shut up and I began to find myself twitching and grinding my teeth too. I knew that Mathews would never stand the strain. Nor could he. . . . About three bells in the first dog-watch he stopped pacing and gave a terrific oath. 'I can't stand this!' he jerked out suddenly—and he took a running jump down the poop companion to the main deck and raced 'midships. '*It's coming aft. It's coming aft!*' screamed the parrot and then I saw Mathews rip one of the fire-axes from its metal holder on the bulkhead of the galley house. He disappeared round the house and there came the furious sound of metal on metal. The screaming rose continuously: '*It's coming aft! It's coming aft!*'—and then sudden new words, words in English we had not heard before, thick, choking, horribly sickening and despairing, '*Collins! Collins! It's got me!*' What else there was, was drowned out by the high-pitched hysterical swearing of Mathews and the vicious noise of the swung ax. And then there was silence—sudden, almost ominous—and Mathews staggered back into view, rocking as if hardly able to keep his feet, and backing right to the rail against which he leaned, breathing hard, the fire-ax limp in one shaking hand. 'Throw the damned thing overboard!' he said viciously and I saw one of the men go reluctantly forward, very slowly, to drag to the side a mangled iron cage in which, bloody and limp, was what was left of the parrot.

"We all watched in utter silence as the cage curved up in the air and fell into the sea. And it seemed as if with the splash there was something oppressive lifted from the ship. She seemed to pick up, grow more buoyant.

"Probably I was the only one on board the *Robert Sutter* who had even a faint tinge of regret, and that mine was perhaps morbid I must admit. But I could not help reflecting that we might have found some clue, a clue to the mysteries of the sea, if we could only have brought that parrot into Callao and before men who knew languages. But there you are. The bird was gone—and we took that barkentine into port without further mishap.

"I remember I told the story to the consul there, told him what I had wondered and hoped, and he laughed at me for a fool. Mathews did not even mention the matter. He was, I fancy, rather ashamed of it. He wanted to forget it. And so whatever it was that befell the *Robert Sutter* remains unknown to this day. I cannot even guess. I have given up trying to guess. . . . Nobody knows. But that parrot knew, and there are times when I wake up at night, in a cold sweat, and can hear its clamor, and see its crouching, palpitating body, and feel ringing in my ears those wild, mad words of men who had been dead for days, screaming while *It* came aft—and trying to shoot Something which could not be shot!"

# *The Street That Wasn't There*

by Clifford Simak and Carl Jacobi

*The world of philosophy is divided between two opposing concepts—materialism and idealism. The basic principle of materialism is that the world is a definite and real thing, existing independently of our senses. The basic theme of idealism is that the world's existence is dependent on our methods of perception—that it is only the idea that counts. The astute philosopher can boil all existing schools of thought down to one of these two fundamental and contradictory axioms. In this story, two science-fiction writers pose a problem in idealism versus materialism. It's a fascinating mental game and makes a really off-trail story.*



MR. JONATHAN CHAMBERS left his house on Maple Street, at exactly seven o'clock in the evening and set out on the daily walk he had taken, at the same time, come rain or snow, for twenty solid years.

The walk never varied. He paced two blocks down Maple Street, stopped at the Red Star confectionery to buy a Rosa Trofero perfecto, then walked to the end of the fourth block on Maple. There he turned right on Lexington, followed Lexington to Oak, down Oak and so by way of Lincoln back to Maple again and to his home.

He took his time. He always returned to his front door at exactly seventy-five. No one ever stopped to talk with him. Even the man at the Red Star confectionery, where he bought his cigar, remained silent while the purchase was being made. Mr. Chambers merely tapped on the glass top of the counter with a coin, the man reached in and brought forth the box, and Mr. Chambers took his cigar. That was all.

For people long ago had gathered that Mr. Chambers desired to be left alone. The newer generation of townsfolk called it eccentricity. Certain uncouth persons had a different word for it. The oldsters remembered that this queer-looking individual with his black silk muffler, rosewood cane and bowler hat once had been a professor at State University.

A professor of metaphysics, they seemed to recall, or some such outlandish subject. At any rate a furore of some sort was connected with his name—at the time an academic scandal. He had written a book, and he had taught the subject matter of that volume to his classes. What that subject matter was had been long forgotten, but it had been considered sufficiently revolutionary to cost Mr. Chambers his post at the University.

A silver moon shone over the chimney tops and a chill, impish October wind was rustling the dead leaves when Mr. Chambers started out at seven

o'clock. It was a good night, he told himself, smelling the clean, crisp air of autumn and the faint pungence of distant wood smoke.

He walked unhurriedly, swinging his cane a bit less jauntily than twenty years ago. He tucked the muffler more securely under the rusty old top-coat and pulled his bowler hat more firmly on his head. He noticed that the street light at the corner of Maple and Jefferson was out, and he grumbled a little to himself when he was forced to step off the walk to encircle a boarded-off section of newly laid concrete work before the driveway of 816.

It seemed that he reached the corner of Lexington and Maple just a bit too quickly, but he told himself that this couldn't be. For he had never done that. For twenty years, since the year following his expulsion from the University, he had lived by the clock. The same thing, at the same time, day after day. He had not deliberately set upon such a life of routine. A bachelor, living alone with sufficient money to supply his humble needs, the timed existence had grown on him gradually.

So he turned on Lexington and back on Oak. The dog at the corner of Oak and Jefferson was waiting for him once again and came out snarling and growling, snapping at his heels. But Mr. Chambers pretended not to notice and the beast gave up the chase.

A radio blared down the street and faint phrases floated to Mr. Chambers.

"... still taking place . . . Empire State building disappeared . . . thin air . . . famed scientist, Dr. Edmund Harcourt . . ."

The wind whipped the muted words away and Mr. Chambers grumbled to himself. Another one of those fantastic radio dramas, probably. He remembered one from many years before, something about the Martians. And Harcourt! What did Harcourt have to do with it? He was one of the men who had ridiculed the book Mr. Chambers had written.

But he pushed speculation away, sniffed the clean, crisp air again, looked at the familiar things that materialized out of the late autumn darkness as he walked along. For there was nothing, absolutely nothing in the world, that he would let upset him. That was a tenet he had laid down twenty years ago.

There was a crowd of men talking excitedly in front of the drugstore at the corner of Oak and Lincoln. Mr. Chambers caught sentences: "It's happening everywhere . . . What do you think it is . . . The scientists can't explain . . ."

But as Mr. Chambers neared them they fell into what seemed an abashed silence and watched him pass. He, on his part, gave them no sign of recognition. That was the way it had been for many years, ever since the people had become convinced that he did not wish to talk. One of the men half started forward as if to speak to him, but then stepped back and Mr. Chambers continued on his walk.

Back at his own front door he stopped and, as he had done a thousand times before, drew forth the heavy gold watch from his pocket.

He started violently. It was only seven-thirty!

For long minutes he stood there staring at the watch in accusation.

The timepiece had not stopped, for it still ticked audibly. But fifteen minutes too soon! For twenty years, day in, day out, he had started out at seven and returned at quarter of eight.

It was not until then that he realized something else was wrong. He had no cigar. For the first time he had neglected to purchase his evening smoke.

Shaken, muttering to himself, Mr. Chambers let himself into his house and locked the door behind him. He hung his hat and coat on the rack in the hall and walked into the living room. Dropping into his favorite chair, he shook his head in bewilderment.

Silence filled the room, a silence measured by the ticking of the old fashioned pendulum clock on the mantelpiece. But silence was no strange thing to Mr. Chambers. Once he had loved music, the kind of music he could get by tuning in symphonic orchestras on the radio. But the radio stood silent in the corner, the cord out of its socket. Mr. Chambers had pulled it out many years before, on the night when the symphonic broadcast had been interrupted to give a news flash.

He had stopped reading newspapers and magazines, too, had exiled himself to a few city blocks. And as the years flowed by, that self-exile had become a prison, an intangible, impassable wall bounded by four city blocks by three. Beyond them lay utter, unexplainable terror. Beyond them he never went.

But recluse though he was, he could not on occasion escape from hearing things the newsboy shouted on the streets, things the men talked about on the drugstore corner when they failed to see him coming. And so he knew that this was the year 1960 and that the wars in Europe and Asia had flamed to an end to be followed by a terrible plague, a plague that even now was sweeping through country after country like wildfire, decimating populations, a plague undoubtedly induced by hunger and privation and the miseries of war.

Those things he put away as items far removed from his own small world. He disregarded them. He pretended he had never heard of them. Others might discuss and worry over them if they wished. To him they simply did not matter. But there were two things tonight that did matter. Two curious, incredible events. He had arrived home fifteen minutes early. He had forgotten his cigar.

Huddled in the chair, he frowned slowly. It was disquieting to have something like that happen. There must be something wrong. Had his long exile finally turned his mind—perhaps just a very little—enough to make him queer? Had he lost his sense of proportion, of perspective?

No, he had not. Take this room, for example. After twenty years it had come to be as much a part of him as the clothes he wore. Every detail of the room was engraved in his mind with clarity: the old center leg table with its green covering and stained glass lamp; the mantelpiece with the dusty bric-à-brac; the pendulum clock that told the time of day as well as the day of the week and month; the elephant ash tray on the tabaret and, most important of all, the marine print.

Mr. Chambers loved that picture. It had depth, he always said. It showed an old sailing ship in the foreground on a placid sea. Far in the distance, almost on the horizon line, was the vague outline of a larger vessel. There were other pictures, too. The forest scene above the fireplace, the old English prints in the corner where he sat, the Currier and Ives above the radio. But the ship print was directly in his line of vision. He could see it without turning his head. He had put it there because he liked it best.

Further reverie became an effort as Mr. Chambers felt himself succumbing to weariness. He undressed and went to bed. For an hour he lay awake, assailed by vague fears he could neither define nor understand.

When finally he dozed off it was to lose himself in a series of horrific dreams. He dreamed first that he was a castaway on a tiny islet in mid-ocean, that the waters around the island teemed with huge poisonous sea snakes, hydrophinnæ, and that steadily those serpents were devouring the island.

In another dream he was pursued by a horror which he could neither see nor hear, but only could imagine. And as he sought to flee he stayed in the one place. His legs worked frantically, pumping like pistons, but he could make no progress. It was as if he ran upon a treadmill.

Then again the terror descended on him, a black, unimagined thing and he tried to scream and could not. He opened his mouth and strained his vocal cords and filled his lungs to bursting with the urge to shriek, but not a sound came from his lips.

All next day he was uneasy and, as he left the house that evening at precisely seven o'clock, he kept saying to himself: "I must not forget tonight! I must remember to stop and get my cigar!"

The street light at the corner of Jefferson was still out and in front of 816 the cemented driveway was still boarded off. Everything was the same as the night before. And now, he told himself, the Red Star confectionery is in the next block. I must not forget tonight. To forget twice in a row would be just too much. He grasped that thought firmly in his mind, strode just a bit more rapidly down the street.

But at the corner he stopped in consternation, and stared down the next block. There was no neon sign, no splash of friendly light upon the sidewalk to mark the little store tucked away in this residential section.

He stared at the street marker and read the word slowly: GRANT. He read it again, unbelieving, for this should not be Grant Street, but Marshall. He had walked two blocks and the confectionery was between Marshall and Grant. He hadn't come to Marshall yet—and here was Grant.

Or had he, absent-mindedly, come one block farther than he thought, passed the store as on the night before?

For the first time in twenty years, Mr. Chambers retraced his steps. He walked back to Jefferson, then turned around and went back to Grant again and on to Lexington. Then back to Grant again, where he stood astounded while a single, incredible fact grew slowly in his brain:

*There was no confectionery! The block from Marshall to Grant had disappeared!*

Now he understood why he had missed the store on the night before, why he had arrived home fifteen minutes early.

On shaky legs he stumbled back to his home. He slammed and locked the door behind him and made his way unsteadily to his chair in the corner.

What was this? What did it mean? By what inconceivable necromancy could a paved street with houses, trees and buildings be spirited away and the space it had occupied be closed up? Was something happening in the world which he, in his secluded life, knew nothing about?

Mr. Chambers shivered, reached to turn up the collar of his coat, then stopped as he realized the room must be warm. A fire blazed merrily in the grate. The cold he felt came from something, somewhere else. The cold of fear and horror, the chill of a half whispered thought.

A deathly silence had fallen, a silence still measured by the pendulum clock, and yet one that held a different tenor from any he had ever sensed before. Not a homely, comfortable silence—but a silence that hinted at emptiness and nothingness.

There was something back of this, Mr. Chambers told himself. Something that reached far back into one corner of his brain and demanded recognition. Something tied up with the fragments of talk he had heard on the drugstore corner, bits of news broadcasts he had heard as he walked along the street, the shrieking of the newsboy calling his papers. Something to do with the happenings in the world from which he had excluded himself.

He brought them back to mind now and lingered over the one central theme of the talk he overheard: the wars and plagues. Hints of a Europe and Asia swept almost clean of human life, of the plague ravaging Africa, of its appearance in South America, of the frantic efforts of the United States to prevent its spread into that nation's boundaries.

Millions of people were dead in Europe and Asia, Africa and South America. And somehow those gruesome statistics seemed tied up with his own experience. Something, somewhere, some part of his earlier life, seemed to hold an explanation.

The pendulum clock struck slowly, its every other chime as usual setting up a sympathetic vibration in the pewter vase that stood upon the mantel.

Mr. Chambers got to his feet, strode to the door, opened it and looked out. Moonlight tessellated the street in black and silver, etching the chimneys and trees against a silvered sky. But the house directly across the street was not the same. It was strangely lop-sided, its dimensions out of proportion, like a house that suddenly had gone mad.

He stared at it in amazement, trying to determine what was wrong with it. He recalled how it had always stood, foursquare, a solid piece of mid-Victorian architecture.

Then, before his eyes, the house righted itself again. Slowly it drew together, ironed out its queer angles, readjusted its dimensions, became once again the stodgy house he knew it had to be.

With a sigh of relief, Mr. Chambers turned back into the hall. But before he closed the door, he looked again. The house was lop-sided—as bad as, perhaps worse than before!

Gulping in fright, Mr. Chambers slammed the door shut, locked it and double bolted it. Then he went to his bedroom and took sleeping powders.

His dreams that night were the same as on the night before. Again there was the islet in mid-ocean. Again he was alone upon it. Again the squirming hydrophinnae were eating his foothold piece by piece.

He awoke, body drenched with perspiration. Vague light of early dawn filtered through the window. The clock on the bedside table showed seven-thirty. For a long time he lay there motionless.

Again the fantastic happenings of the night before came back to haunt him and, as he lay there staring at the windows, he remembered them, one by one. But his mind, still fogged by sleep and astonishment, took the happenings in its stride, mulled over them, lost the keen edge of fantastic terror that lurked around them.

The light through the windows slowly grew brighter. Mr. Chambers slid out of bed and crossed to the window, the cold of the floor biting into his bare feet. He forced himself to look out.

There was nothing outside the window. No shadows. As if there might be a fog. But no fog, however thick, could hide the apple tree that grew close against the house.

But the tree *was* there—shadowy, indistinct in the gray, with a few withered apples still clinging to its boughs, a few shriveled leaves reluctant to leave the parent branch. The tree was there now. But it had not been there when he first had looked. Mr. Chambers was sure of that.

And now he saw the faint outlines of his neighbor's house—but those outlines were all wrong. They didn't jibe and fit together, they were out of plumb, as if some giant hand had grasped the house and wrenched it out of true, like the house he had seen across the street the night before, the house that had painfully righted itself when he thought of how it should look.

Perhaps if he thought of how his neighbor's house should look, it too might right itself. But Mr. Chambers was very weary. Too weary to think about the house. He turned from the window and dressed slowly. In the living room he slumped into his chair, put his feet on the old cracked ottoman. For a long time he sat, trying to think.

And then, abruptly, something like an electric shock ran through him. Rigid, he sat there, limp inside at the thought. Minutes later he crossed the room to the old mahogany bookcase that stood against the wall. There were many volumes in the case: his beloved classics on the first shelf, his many scientific works on the lower shelves. The second shelf contained but one book around which Mr. Chambers' entire life was centered.

Twenty years ago he had written it and foolishly attempted to teach its philosophy to a class of undergraduates. The newspapers, he remembered, had made a great deal of it at the time. Tongues had been set to wagging. Narrow-minded townsfolk failing to understand either his philosophy or his aim, but seeing in him another exponent of some antirational cult, had forced his expulsion from the school.

It was a simple book, really, dismissed by most authorities as merely the

vagaries of an over-zealous mind. Mr. Chambers took it down now, opened its cover and began thumbing through the pages. For a moment the memory of happier days swept over him.

Then his eyes found the paragraph, a paragraph written so long ago that the very words seemed strange and unreal:

*Man himself, by the power of mass suggestion, holds the physical fate of this earth, yes, even of the universe. Millions of minds seeing trees as trees, houses as houses, streets as streets, and not as something else. Minds that see things as they are and have kept things as they were. . . . Destroy those minds and the entire foundation of matter, robbed of its regenerative power, will crumple and slip away like a column of sand. . . .*

His eyes followed down the page:

*Yet this would have nothing to do with matter itself, but only with matter's form. For while the mind of man through long ages may have moulded an imagery of that space in which he lives, mind would have little conceivable influence upon the existence of that matter. What exists in our known universe shall exist always and can never be destroyed, only altered or transformed.*

*But in modern astrophysics and mathematics we gain an insight into the possibility and probability that there are other dimensions, other brackets of time and space impinging on the one we occupy. If a pin is thrust into a shadow, would that shadow have any knowledge of the pin? It would not, for in this case the shadow is two dimensional, the pin three dimensional. Yet both occupy the same space.*

*Granting then that the power of men's minds alone holds this universe, or at least this world in its present form, may we not go farther and envision other minds on some other plane watching us, waiting, waiting craftily for the time they can take over the domination of matter? Such a concept is not impossible. It is a natural conclusion if we accept the double hypothesis: that mind does control the formation of all matter; and that other worlds lie in juxtaposition with ours.*

*Perhaps we shall come upon a day, far distant, when our plane, our world will dissolve beneath our feet and before our eyes as some stronger intelligence reaches out from the dimensional shadows of the very space we live in and wrests from us the matter which we know to be our own.*

He stood astounded beside the bookcase, his eyes staring unseeing into the fire upon the hearth. He had written that. And because of those words he had been called a heretic, had been compelled to resign his position at the University, had been forced into this hermit life.

A tumultuous idea hammered at him. Men had died by the millions all over the world. Where there had been thousands of minds there now were one or two. A feeble force to hold the form of matter intact. The plague had swept Europe and Asia almost clean of life, had blighted Africa, had reached South America—might even have come to the United States. He remembered the whispers he had heard, the words of the men at the drug-store corner, the buildings disappearing. Something scientists could not explain. But those were merely scraps of information. He did not know

the whole story . . . he could not know. He never listened to the radio, never read a newspaper.

But abruptly the whole thing fitted together in his brain like the missing piece of a puzzle into its slot. The significance of it all gripped him with damning clarity. There were not sufficient minds in existence to retain the material world in its mundane form. Some other power from another dimension was fighting to supersede man's control and take his universe into its own plane!

Abruptly Mr. Chambers closed the book, shoved it back in the case and picked up his hat and coat. He had to know more. He had to find someone who could tell him. He moved through the hall to the door, emerged into the street. On the walk he looked skyward, trying to make out the sun. But there was no sun—only an all pervading grayness that shrouded everything, not a fog, but a gray emptiness that seemed devoid of life, of any movement.

The walk led to his gate and there it ended, but as he moved forward the sidewalk came into view and the house ahead loomed out of the gray, but a house with differences.

He moved forward rapidly. Visibility extended only a few feet and as he approached them the houses materialized like two dimensional pictures without perspective, like twisted cardboard soldiers lining up for review on a misty morning. Once he stopped and looked back and saw that the grayness had closed in behind him. The houses were wiped out, the sidewalk faded into nothing.

He shouted, hoping to attract attention. But his voice frightened him. It seemed to ricochet up and into the higher levels of the sky, as if a giant door had been opened to a mighty room high above him.

He went on until he came to the corner of Lexington. There, on the curb, he stopped and stared. The gray wall was thicker there but he did not realize how close it was until he glanced down at his feet and saw there was nothing, nothing at all beyond the curbstone. No dull gleam of wet asphalt, no sign of a street. It was as if all eternity ended here at the corner of Maple and Lexington.

With a wild cry, Mr. Chambers turned and ran. Back down the street he raced, coat streaming after him in the wind, bowler hat bouncing on his head.

Panting, he reached the gate and stumbled up the walk, thankful that it still was there.

On the stoop he stood for a moment, breathing hard. He glanced back over his shoulder and a queer feeling of inner numbness seemed to well over him. At that moment the gray nothingness appeared to thin, the enveloping curtain fell away, and he saw . . .

Vague and indistinct, yet cast in stereoscopic outline, a gigantic city was limned against the darkling sky. It was a city fantastic with cubed domes, spires, and aerial bridges and flying buttresses. Tunnel-like streets, flanked on either side by shining metallic ramps and runways, stretched endlessly to the vanishing point. Great shafts of multicolored light probed huge streamers and ellipses above the higher levels.

And beyond, like a final backdrop, rose a titanic wall. It was from the crenelated parapets and battlements of that wall that Mr. Chambers felt the eyes peering at him, thousands of eyes glaring down with but a single purpose. As he continued to look, something else seemed to take form above that wall—a design this time, that swirled and writhed in the ribbons of radiance and rapidly coalesced into strange geometric features, without definite line or detail. A colossal face, a face of indescribable power and evil, it was, staring down with malevolent composure.

Then the city and the face slid out of focus; the vision faded like a darkened magic-lantern, and the grayness moved in again.

Mr. Chambers pushed open the door of his house. But he did not lock it. There was no need of locks—not any more.

A few coals of fire still smouldered in the grate and going there, he stirred them up, raked away the ash, piled on more wood. The flames leaped merrily, dancing in the chimney's throat. Without removing his hat and coat, he sank exhausted in his favorite chair, closed his eyes, then opened them again.

He sighed with relief as he saw the room was unchanged. Everything in its accustomed place: the clock, the lamp, the elephant ash tray, the marine print on the wall. Everything was as it should be. The clock measured the silence with its measured ticking; it chimed abruptly and the vase sent up its usual sympathetic vibration.

This was his room, he thought. Rooms acquire the personality of the person who lives in them, become a part of him. This was his world, his own private world, and as such it would be the last to go.

But how long could he maintain its existence?

Mr. Chambers stared at the marine print and for a moment a little breath of reassurance returned to him. *They* couldn't take this away. The rest of the world might dissolve because there was insufficient power of thought to retain its outward form. But this room was his. He alone had furnished it. He alone, since he had first planned the house's building, had lived here. This room would stay. It must stay on, it must . . .

He crossed the room to the bookcase, and stood staring at the second shelf with its single volume. His eyes shifted to the top shelf and swift terror gripped him.

For all the books were not there. A lot of books were not there! Only the most beloved, the most familiar ones. So the change already had started here! The unfamiliar books were gone and that fitted into the pattern—for it would be the least familiar things that would go first.

Wheeling, he stared across the room. Was it his imagination, or did the lamp on the table blur and begin to fade away? But as he stared at it, it became clear again, a solid, substantial thing.

For a moment real fear reached out and touched him with chilly fingers. He understood that this room no longer was proof against the thing that had happened out there on the street.

Or had it really happened? Might not all this exist within his own mind? Might not the street be as it always was, with laughing children and bark-

ing dogs? Might not the Red Star confectionery still exist, splashing the street with the red of its neon sign?

Could it be that he was going mad? He had heard whispers when he had passed, whispers the gossiping housewives had not intended him to hear. And he had heard the shouting of boys when he walked by. They thought him mad. Could he be really mad?

He was sure he was not mad. He knew that he perhaps was the sanest of all men who walked the earth. For he, and he alone, had foreseen this very thing. And the others had scoffed at him for it.

Somewhere else the children might be playing on a street. But it would be a different street. And the children undoubtedly would be different, too. For the matter of which the street and everything upon it had been formed would now be cast in a different mold, stolen by different minds in a different dimension.

*Perhaps we shall come upon a day, far distant, when our plane, our world will dissolve beneath our feet and before our eyes as some stronger intelligence reaches out from the dimensional shadows of the very space we live in and wrests from us the matter which we know to be our own.*

But there had been no need to wait for that distant day. Scant years after he had written those prophetic words the thing was happening. Man had played unwittingly into the hands of those other minds in the other dimension. Man had waged a war and war had bred a pestilence. And the whole vast cycle of events was but a detail of a cyclopean plan.

He could see it all now. By an insidious mass hypnosis' minions from that other dimension . . . or was it one supreme intelligence . . . had deliberately sown the seeds of dissension. The reduction of the world's mental power had been carefully planned with diabolic premeditation.

On impulse he suddenly turned, crossed the room and opened the connecting door to the bedroom. He stopped on the threshold and a gasp forced its way to his lips.

There was no bedroom. Where his stolid four poster and dresser had been there was grayish nothingness.

Like an automaton he turned again and paced to the hall door. Here, too, he found what he had expected. There was no hall, no familiar hat rack and umbrella stand.

Nothing. . . .

Weakly Mr. Chambers moved back to his chair in the corner.

"So here I am," he said, half aloud.

So there he was. Embattled in the last corner of the world that was left to him.

Perhaps there were other men like him, he thought. Men who stood at bay against the emptiness that marked the transition from one dimension to another. Men who had lived close to the things they loved, who had endowed those things with such substantial form by power of mind alone that they now stood out alone against the power of some greater mind.

The street was gone. The rest of his house was gone. This room still retained its form.

This room, he knew, would stay the longest. And when the rest of the room was gone, this corner with his favorite chair would remain. For this was the spot where he had lived for twenty years. The bedroom was for sleeping, the kitchen for eating. This room was for living. This was his last stand. These were the walls and floors and prints and lamps that had soaked up his will to make them walls and prints and lamps.

He looked out the window into a blank world. His neighbors' houses already were gone. They had not lived with them as he had lived with this room. Their interests had been divided, thinly spread; their thoughts had not been concentrated as his upon an area four blocks by three, or a room fourteen by twelve.

Staring through the window, he saw it again. The same vision he had looked upon before and yet different in an indescribable way. There was the city illumined in the sky. There were the elliptical towers and turrets, the cube-shaped domes and battlements. He could see with stereoscopic clarity the aerial bridges, the gleaming avenues sweeping on into infinitude. The vision was nearer this time, but the depth and proportion had changed, as if he were viewing it from two concentric angles at the same time.

And the face, the face of magnitude, of power of cosmic craft and evil. . . .

Mr. Chambers turned his eyes back into the room. The clock was ticking slowly, steadily. The grayness was stealing into the room. The table and radio were the first to go. They simply faded away and with them went one corner of the room.

Now as he sat there it did not seem queer to be without the table or the radio. It was as if it were something quite normal. Something one could expect to happen. Perhaps, if he thought hard enough, he could bring them back. But, after all, what was the use? One man, alone, could not stand off the irresistible march of nothingness. One man, all alone, simply could not.

He wondered what the elephant ash tray looked like in that other dimension. It certainly would not be an elephant ash tray, nor would the radio be a radio, for perhaps they did not have ash trays or radios or elephants in the invading dimension.

He wondered, as a matter of fact, what he himself would look like when he finally slipped into the unknown. For he was matter, too, just as the ash tray and radio were matter. He wondered if he would retain his individuality, if he still would be a person. Or would he merely be a thing?

There was one answer to all of that. He simply didn't know.

Nothingness advanced upon him, ate its way across the room, stalking him as he sat in the chair underneath the lamp. He waited for it.

The room, or what was left of it, plunged into dreadful silence.

Mr. Chambers started. The clock had stopped. Funny . . . the first time in twenty years.

He leaped from his chair and then sat down again.

The clock hadn't stopped.

It wasn't there.

There was a tingling sensation in his feet.

THE END

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